



A
TASTE
OF HAVEN

THE ALEXANDER WOLVES

SIERRA SUMMERS

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The Alexander Wolves

Sierra Summers

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This is a work of fiction. The characters, incidents and dialogues in this book are of the author's imagination and are not to be construed as real. Any resemblance to actual events or persons, living or dead, is completely coincidental.

Blurb

Haven Smith is a shifter who has never shifted. She spends her evenings protecting women and children from the men who would hurt them. She likes her solitary life just fine, until one night she meets a man who changes her world forever. Adam is determined to take Haven to meet the family she doesn't remember and show her that she deserves love—his love.

Dedication

This book is dedicated to S.A.M as well as all women who have found their Adam.

Chapter One

Haven Smith stopped in front of a tall red brick tenement and peered around the corner, the barely audible mew of fear still echoing in her ears. There was a little light coming from a sickly yellow bulb near the top of the roof, but it didn't extend to the lower part of the building. Her exceptional night vision allowed her to see what others might not, like the trash spilling over from large bins next to the Mexican restaurant opposite the low-income apartment building.

Her spine began to tingle as her wolf clamored for release.

Sorry girl, you don't get to come out—ever.

She didn't want to be here tonight, her body hadn't quite healed from the last fight three days ago. But the scent of fear and blood hung in the air, calling to her and making it impossible to leave.

Another muffled cry sounded in the darkness. Keeping her back to the wall, she slipped around the corner and followed the pitiful noise on cat's feet. She stepped in a puddle of unidentifiable nastiness she wouldn't allow her nose to name and winced. She'd just bought the Rockports. *Dammit!*

Slipping behind the nearest dumpster allowed her to see what was going on while hiding her from anyone's view. At the alley's dead-end a man had a woman pinned against the brick façade, her face smashed against the wall. He'd wrapped one beefy hand around her throat while his other ripped at her dress.

The woman's cries were cut off by the fucker's grip on her neck. Lightning-hot anger speared Haven's stomach and she pulled her switchblade as if by instinct. With a quick flick of her wrist the six-inch blade came to life in her hand. The familiar weight of the weapon was always welcome. She crept from behind the dumpster and made her way to the would-be rapist and his victim. Her first instinct was to snap his neck, but that would be illegal. She might want to kill the bastard but she wouldn't. *This time!*

Instead she threw her arm around his throat, catching him off guard. He was no match for her and even with his girth Haven was stronger... She scraped the blade along the side of his neck and he immediately let go of the female.

"Go get the police," Haven snarled as the woman spun, clutching her throat.

Haven immediately recognized her platinum blonde hair and sunken blue eyes—it was Honey. She'd tried to get the woman out of the "trade" and into a shelter more than once—and failed. The woman pulled at her tor clothes and took off toward the front of the alley; there was no way Honey was going to flag down a cop.

Knowing that made her even more angry. Her mother had been steps away from the same kind of life until she died, rolling through man after man in a vain search for someone to take care of her and her daughter. Honey had just gone further down the rabbit hole, and Haven had made it her business to avenge these women from assholes like the one beneath her knife.

"You need to learn a lesson about trying to take what you haven't paid for." A low menacing rumble escaped her throat. *Fuck!*

"Fuck you, bitch. The only reason you're still alive is because you got a knife to my throat." Oh yeah, he wanted to hurt her; the stink of a madman dripped from his pores,

but she really didn't give a damn.

"You're right. We can't have a fair fight if I'm armed. So I'll put my knife away and then I'm going to kick your ass." She closed the knife on her hip, slipped it into her pocket and stepped back.

The asshole spun around. His fleshy face was covered in sweat, and he resembled a washed-out wrestler who'd taken too many steroids. His mouth curled up on one side and formed a snarl. He was Haven's favorite type of jerk-off—big and burly, going around hurting any woman he pleased. She might have been too young to intercede for her mother but she was making up for it now.

He brought his fists up, readying himself for the fight.

She put her hands on her hips, like she had all the time in the world, and laughed. "Come on, fat boy, let's see what you got."

He cracked his knuckles. "You got it, bitch."

He threw out one massive fist, putting all his weight behind the punch. Haven ducked and he sailed right past her. She turned, kicked and connected between his shoulder blades, but he didn't go down. She frowned and ran at his back, kicking him in the side this time. She heard the crack of ribs through the padding of fat layering his middle. She wanted to end this quickly, but her inner beast was only getting started.

Her nostrils flared as the smell of real fear rent the air. He'd never expected her to kick so damn hard. She grabbed his thick wrist and spun him around to face her. He recovered more quickly from her kick than she expected and managed to clock her in the jaw. The left side of her face went numb from the blow and this time she let out a howl that caused the man's eyes to widen and back away.

"What's the matter, big boy? Scared of a little woman like me?" Haven knew questioning his manhood was the easiest way to antagonize him into continuing the fight. "I thought bad-assed men like you got off beating up a girl. God knows you couldn't handle yourself with a real man."

He grabbed his crotch. "Dumb bitch, I'm gonna show you what a real man is *after I bust your ass.*" Haven dropped into a crouch and beckoned him in a come-hither motion. "Bring it on, then. You hit like a girl."

He moved fast for a fat slob, but not fast enough. He swung again. She stepped aside and he connected with nothing but air. She stuck her foot out as he lunged past and tripped him. Caught up by her foot, his body turned slightly.

The position gave him the advantage, and as he started to fall he grabbed her arm and hauled her down with him.

Haven's back slammed into the rough pavement, knocking the air from her lungs. She was pissed beyond belief that she'd let him take her down. Asshole landed on top of her, taking what little breath she had left with him. He straddled her upper chest, pinning her arms at her sides, and smiled. "It's your turn to bleed now, whore."

She desperately tried to breathe; he was literally smothering her with his weight. He swung his hand and slapped her hard across the mouth.

"Someone needs to show you how to be more respectful." Sweat dripped off his forehead, the disgusting droplets falling on her chin.

"Fuck you." She spat, and blood mixed with saliva landed on his face. He raised his hand again and punched her in the nose. Blood squirted out, dribbling into her mouth and down the sides of her face.

A fire burned in her belly as she swallowed some of her own blood. The burning became more painful, spreading from her middle and out to her limbs. Her head started buzzing and the only thing running through it was *kill, kill, kill*.

With renewed strength, she bent her knees up and bucked him off. Rolling to her knees, she wiped the blood trickling from her nose across her sleeve.

“That’s all you got?” she snarled. “You’re a pussy.”

She watched him carefully, waiting for his muscles to tense. She held her closed hands to her chest. She never felt as alive as she did when she fought one of these bastards. Her senses were sharper, she could see better, her hearing was astonishingly acute. She inhaled when the breeze shifted slightly.

The asshole’s fear wrapped around him like a fur coat. He wanted to run, but his ego wouldn’t allow a *woman* kick his ass.

He lunged for her again, his heavy body moving a little slower this time. When he reached for her she threw out an arm, blocking his attack and smashed him in the nose with her free hand. He doubled over as blood spurted. Haven followed up with a quick jab to the chin. His head flew back a precious second before she kicked and connected with his balls.

He wasn’t going to get laid for a long time to come. Big boy went to his knees, cupping his crotch. He looked at her and spit. Haven kicked him in the throat in a coup de grace that kept him from crying out for help. He fell on his back with a hard *thunk*, little sobs coming rending the air as he cupped his balls.

Haven leaned over him and grabbed the shoulder of his dirty wife-beater tank top. “Don’t you ever fucking come back around here again, fat man. Next time you won’t be walking away from this alley.”

She let go of his shirt, and he fell back to the ground. Turning away from the heap he made on the ground, she jogged out of the alley and onto the empty street. Honey hadn’t called the cops, but she hadn’t expected the longtime hooker to go to the police. Honey’d been picked up so many times on prostitution charges she no longer trusted the police to help her. Haven would track her down later and try—once again—to get her away from her pimp and into Fatima’s shelter. She swiped at her bloody nose as she made her way back to her apartment.

Her face was already swelling. The blood flow from her nose trickled slowly but hadn’t stopped; she wasn’t healing as quickly as she used to. The beast inside rumbled its disapproval at her current state of pain.

She picked up the pace, not wanting to draw any attention. She needed to get the dirt, grime and stink from the asshole off her skin.

As she trotted down the sidewalk, the smell of pine and rain floated on the air. The scent was so out of place it brought her to a standstill. She inhaled deeply, enjoying the cleanliness of it. She turned around slowly, trying to find the source of the scent, but saw nothing on the empty streets. And as quickly as it had come, the smell was gone. Haven shook her head, sure she was imagining things.

* * * *

She forced her sore, tired body back to her tiny apartment. The first-floor studio wasn’t much, but it was home. She unlocked the door and turned on the light, bathing the room in a soft, soothing light. She sat down in an overstuffed chair she’d picked up at a

resale shop, her body sinking back against the worn fabric.

She was bone tired. It was getting harder to take a punch. She sighed. For a split second back in the alley she'd been afraid. The feeling had been fleeting, but for the first time since she'd begun her crusade she'd really been scared. The knotting sensation in her stomach wasn't something she wanted to experience again.

Her nose had finally stopped bleeding so she peeled her t-shirt over her head, wiped her face and threw the shirt into the laundry basket placed squarely in the corner of the room.

She heaved her tired body out of the chair and walked grabbing a bottle of Labatt's out of the fridge. Twisting the cap off the bottle, she took a long gulp. The cold liquid slid down and soothed her parched throat. She held the sweating bottle against her swelling eye.

Damn, she couldn't believe the jerk-off had gotten in as many punches as he had. It was obvious her body was letting her know it needed to rest. *That had to be it, didn't it?*

For some reason, the image of her mother was particularly vivid tonight, and with her at the worst possible moments. Like right now. The parade of men who'd traipsed through her life when she was growing up was never far from her mind. They were the reason she trolled for bad guys out to harm women.

In response to the memories, adrenaline pumped through her veins and her wolf demanded release.

She broke into a sweat as the beast scrambled to escape, howling in anger. Haven tried desperately to ignore her but failed as her mother's dire warnings tolled in her head.

Shifting is evil. You'll go crazy. Crazier than your father.

"Fuck. Why now?" She should have known better than let her mind wander through the past. Her wolf was a bitter bitch and it was getting harder and harder to control her. "You're not getting out, so shut the hell up."

Talking never worked, so she changed strategies and reached for her blade. The only way to keep the animal at bay was pain. The pain she felt now had come from the fight earlier. This called for a different kind of pain. Chills ran down her spine and her body started to shake as she battled for dominance. She snapped open the knife with a flick of her wrist, held her arm over the sink, placed the tip of the blade to the crook of her arm and made a one-inch slice. The pain served as a balm to the wolf at the door. She made a second and then a third cut. The pressure inside her eased. The last one finally slowed her heart rate and her breathing began to normalize. The anger slowly drained from her body and calm washed over her.

She hated doing this to herself, but it was the only way that didn't involve drugs or a barrel full of alcohol. It was her one shameful weakness.

With the adrenaline rush gone, she grew even wearier. She moved to the only other room in her home, the bathroom, stripped off the rest of her clothing and turned on the shower.

She stepped beneath the spray, and the freezing temperature woke her enough to remind her that she was still covered in blood and alley grime. She focused on the bottom of the tub where blood and dirt circled the drain. When the last traces of grime disappeared in a swirl, she finally felt clean. She turned the hot water on and let the heat soak into her tired muscles.

After warming up under the heated water, she stepped out. Wrapping a soft white

towel around her, she looked in the mirror. Her left eye already had a bruise and another was forming on her right. She opened the medicine cabinet and retrieved antiseptic and some pain pills. Dabbing at the cut across the bridge of her nose and another on her bottom lip, she winced at the slight sting. Hell, she could take a punch to the face and never make a sound, but wanted to cry as she cleaned the wound. The irony of it never ceased to amaze her. Patch job complete, she filled a glass with water then tossed back two pain pills. She needed to get horizontal since she'd be dead to the world in less than fifteen minutes.

Thank God for pharmaceuticals she thought, staggering to the bedroom. Dropping the towel on the floor, she peeled back the blanket and crept between it and the sheet. Grabbing the pillow next to her, she turned on her side, holding it to her stomach. It was the way she went to sleep most nights, and normally comforted her, but tonight was different.

Tonight, for the first time in a long time, Haven was lonely. It was the kind of lonely that left a knot in her stomach and an ache in her soul. Maybe it was because she was turning thirty and had no one to celebrate with. Maybe she just needed to get laid. Whatever the reasons, her melancholy would have to wait for another day.

Just as her lids began to droop and the magic little pills made a dent in her pain, the phone beside her bed rang. She blindly reached for the offensive thing and picked it up before it rang again.

"Hello." Her voice cracked.

"Haven you sound like hell." Fatima, the one person in the world she trusted. "Have you been out again?"

Fatima was the only one who knew about Haven's nightly activities. The Lebanese-born woman understood her vigilante romps.

"Yeah, but I don't have anyone for you this evening."

Normally when she stepped into a situation where a woman was being abused, she would take the victim to Fatima's shelter. Her friend's sanctuary wasn't known to social services. She was able to work outside the law when it came to housing battered women and children. Fatima was able help women disappear from the reach of their abusers.

"I understand. One of Donovan's men brought in a woman and her three kids tonight." Her friend sounded as tired as Haven felt.

Donovan was Fatima's mysterious benefactor. He provided money and the building for her work. Haven never questioned Fatima about Donovan and her friend never offered any information. No skin off Haven's nose. Whatever went on between the two allowed Fatima to save and care for hundreds of women and children who might otherwise be dead.

"Do you need anything?" She knew the answer before she even asked it. Another reason she loved Fatima.

"No thanks, I've got everything under control. Get some sleep. We'll talk soon." Fatima ended the call. They never said goodbye. Fatima thought it was bad luck.

She turned over to her other side, closed her eyes as the pain pills kicked in and allowed sleep to take over.

Chapter Two

Haven leaned against the worn Formica counter at the diner. Her feet were sore and she was sweating under her polyester uniform. Twenty minutes and she would be off.

Her boss handed her a soda. "What happened to your face this time, kid?" Harry was a gruff old merchant marine whose voice had turned to gravel by smoking too much.

"Come on, Harry, I told you I've been taking karate lessons. The guys at the gym get a little overzealous sometimes."

Harry raised an eyebrow. "I don't recall seeing anyone getting their ass kicked taking karate lessons."

Haven just shrugged. She hated lying to him but it wasn't like she could tell him the truth. *Um, well, Harry, you see I go out every night and hunt down abusers and kick ass. Oh, and by the way, I'm a wolf shifter.*"

"You know that Fatima girl could help you if you're in trouble. I'll help you if you're in trouble." His thick beefy hands white knuckled the counter. She knew it was hard for Harry to offer his assistance. He generally kept his employees at a distance but had taken to Haven the moment she started working for him.

At first she thought he was hitting on her, but later learned he'd had a daughter her age that had been killed a few years earlier. A random act of violence that had torn his marriage apart and changed his world forever.

She touched his forearm and gave it a squeeze. "Thanks Harry, but I swear to you I'm fine."

The older man grunted and went back into the kitchen, mumbling under his breath. Haven's excuses for her injuries were getting old and no one at work believed her anymore. She didn't want to leave the small diner she'd worked at for the last two years, but she would if the questions got any nosier.

* * * *

Three days later Haven walked down Second Street. She hadn't patrolled here in a few weeks. This neighborhood was the lowest of the low and every other house was a burnt shell. The empty, intact buildings had become places to deal drugs. Crack and Meth were the drugs of choice for most addicts who came here.

She'd been walking for at least an hour when she heard a cry. It was barely discernable, but her hearing trumped a human's. She stopped and closed her eyes, trying to get a scent, but the breeze was not cooperating. She walked another block and the cries became louder. She started jogging toward the whimpering until she narrowed it down to an abandoned house. Like so many homes in this neighborhood, the front was completely boarded up, so Haven walked cautiously up the broken driveway. She was knee-deep in weeds and whatever rodents called this place home. At the back corner she found a small uncovered window with the screen pulled away.

She peered through the window, her eyes adjusting to the deepening darkness. The room was small, the only thing in it a rusted claw-foot tub. She grabbed the edge of the sill and hauled herself up, sliding headfirst into the house.

The floor and tub were littered with used needles and broken porcelain tile. She stepped carefully around the trash and through the empty doorway into a large room. Several people were lying on the floor in various states of undress. Some huddled together for warmth along the far wall. Two passed a crack pipe back and forth and never even bothered to look in her direction as she passed them.

The muffled weeping was much louder in the house, but whoever it was had to be gagged. She followed the sounds up a flight of stairs. She didn't bother trying to be stealthy about it; she imagined people came in and out of this hell house on a frequent basis.

Reaching the top of the stairs she stopped and listened. It was impossible to follow a scent with the nausea-inducing of smell blood, drugs and human waste floating on the air. A scream sounded from down the hall, and she zeroed in on the third door to her left.

Haven kicked the door off its hinges and slid into the oily darkness in one corner of a room, her speed making her almost invisible to the drug-addled inhabitants.

A woman was tied spread-eagle on a filthy mattress, her hands bound roughly above her head and each ankle secured to the metal footboard. She was gagged, blindfolded and covered only by a dirty sheet.

One man sat on the bed in nothing but boxers, while two others stood on the other side waiting for their turn.

"This just isn't your day, fellas." Haven murmured, and stepped into their range of sight. "But it *is* my night. Three for the price of one."

The man on the bed rushed her; she punched him in the chest and he fell like a brick.

"I'm disappointed, boys. He was way too easy." Her blood was humming, sending heat skimming along her skin.

The taller of the two left standing smiled. "Don't worry, baby, he wasn't with us anyway."

"Too bad, you all could have reminisced together about the time a girl kicked your..." Haven was cut off as a pair of arms wrapped tightly around her chest. She tried to kick her legs up but her foot slipped on the floor. Her assailant switched one hand to the front of her throat. Dammit, she hadn't noticed the fourth guy in the room.

"Well, well, well. Look who we have here." Haven closed her eyes; she recognized the voice from three nights ago.

"Christ. Didn't you learn your lesson when I busted your balls the other night?" The hand tightened painfully around her neck.

"I told you I'd get you, bitch." His rancid breath blew along the side of her face. She grimaced as he squeezed harder, "Lucky me."

"Listen up, you dumb bitch." He laughed and bit her earlobe. "You just happened to win the other night cause I was doped up. I'm clean and sober now and I'm gonna beat you and then I'm gonna let these two men have their fucking way with you before I shred you. By the time I'm done they'll find you in bits and pieces all over this city." He ended his tirade with a small growl.

Oh fuck, fuck, fuck, he was a shifter. For the first time since she'd begun her patrols she was really afraid. She never fought another shifter before and was clueless if they were matched equally or if he was stronger because he was a male.

She sure as hell wasn't about to stand around and wait for him to kill her. The shifter released her chest but kept hold of her throat; one wrong move and her larynx would be

crushed. He moved to stand in front of her, sliding his hand along her throat as he went.

“I’ve been dreaming about this.” He hissed and drew back his fist, then punched Haven in the jaw. She flew across the room and into the wall. Plaster shattered and she landed on her ass.

Laughter rang out in the room and his hands wrapped around her ankles. The asshole was much stronger tonight and she knew he could snap her bones if he chose. Instead he dragged her away from the wall and into the middle of the room. She kicked hard but couldn’t break his hold.

The other two decided to join in the fun and jumped her. Each pushed a shoulder into the floor. The shifter crawled up her body, his knees pinning her shoulders, and spat out, “You sit on the bitches legs. She likes to kick.”

One of the men left his place at her shoulder and moved down to straddle her calves. Christ. What the hell was she going to do now? Adrenaline rushed through her bloodstream as the fight or flight response kicked in. Her stomach started to cramp, a symptom of her wolf trying to break free and bring about the change.

In a panic she started to kick and wriggle, trying to free herself. The weight of both men made it almost impossible to move. The shifter leaned forward. Haven took a chance and head butted him. For the second time she drew blood as her head connected with his nose, but this time he didn’t let go. He grabbed her hair and banged her head on the wood floor. “That’s the last time you’re gonna make me bleed.”

The room tilted and Haven knew she was about to black out. This was not how she pictured herself leaving this world. Not in a crack house and not by another shifter.

The scent of pine and fresh rain filled the room, effectively distracting the asshole on top of her as he noticed the foreign scent. When he raised his nose in the air and inhaled, he raised off of her enough and she leaned up and bit him in the thigh. He screamed and she bit down even harder, ripping his jeans and sinking her teeth into his flesh. He flew off of her and disappeared through the doorway and into the dark hallway beyond.

A huge bang and what sounded like bodies rolling down the stairs distracted the other two men which gave Haven the advantage, and she kicked and pushed the men off. Grabbing one by the shirt, she threw him into the same wall she’d broken earlier. He slumped in a heap on the ground. The last man standing cowered in the corner, shaking with his hands covering his face.

A soft groan turned Haven’s attention from him and over to the bed. She ran to the woman and took off the woman’s blindfold. Her pale green eyes were glassy and distant; she was under the influence of something. Haven made quick work of untying her. Grabbing a discarded shirt, she wrapped it around the victim’s frail shoulders. “You’re coming with me. I have a safe place for you.”

The woman continued to stare into space, unaware of her surroundings. Haven hauled her up into her arms; she couldn’t have weighed more than a hundred pounds soaking wet. She left the bedroom and rushed down the stairs. The other shifter was gone, as were the rest of the inhabitants. Haven wasn’t sure who or what had come to her aid, but if she ever discovered their identity she owed them a huge thank you and as many drinks as they wanted.

This was the first time in her life she’d come so close to death; she never wanted to be there again. Of course she’d never fought another shifter before, either. Leaving the house, she walked to the next block. She took out her cell and flipped it open, pressing

the speed dial, then sat on the curb and held the still unmoving woman in her lap.

Fatima answered on the fourth ring.

“I’m on Fourth and Hoover and I need a pick up.”

“Are you all right?” Fatima’s concern pulled at Haven’s heart, but she didn’t have time to bask in the knowledge someone in her life cared about her well being.

“I’m fine, but I’ve got a girl who’s all doped up and might have been raped. Please send someone to get her.”

“Ten minutes.” Tima promised.

Her body ached; two major fights within a few days was killing her. Her head screamed in pain as she held the woman and tried to fight off the change her body demanded she make.

Forcing her mind to other things, she discovered she wanted, no, needed, to know who’d helped her back in the house. Her chest ached as she remembered the clean scent. She hadn’t seen a face, but she would never forget the smell her would-be savior wore.

She needed a fucking vacation, somewhere warm. Somewhere she could laze the day away and not have to worry about anything but what she was going to have for dinner.

Headlights in the distance closed in on her position. Haven stood with her bundle and moved back into the shadows. A black Mercedes pulled alongside the curb, the passenger side door opened and a man dressed in black with long pale blond hair stepped out.

“Haven Smith, Fatima sent me. I’m one of Donovan’s men.”

Haven left the darkness and walked to the car. “Allow me.” He took the woman from her arms, loaded the girl into the back seat and turned to face Haven.

“You need medical attention. Please let us take you back to your friend.” His voice was smooth and quiet. It carried a cadence that was almost songlike as he spoke.

“No thanks. I’m not going your way. Just get her to Fatima.” Haven backed away. If there was one thing she recognized it was a predator, and this man was exactly that. Pale blue eyes and paler skin, his body was tall and thin like a marathon runner. He may have appeared to be a little thin, but Haven had no doubts about his strength.

“As you wish.” He bowed slightly, got back into the car and it pulled away. Haven started jogging home. The adrenaline rush was keeping her pain away for the time being and she wanted to be in her apartment before the juice ran out. She changed the jog to a full-out run and took off into the night.

* * * *

Haven tipped back the shot of vodka and slapped the bar, signaling for another. Work had gone exactly as she’d expected. Harry insisted that she come clean about what was making her face look like a color wheel. She spent the better part of the afternoon insisting she’d gotten her butt beat by a black belt bent of proving himself.

No one at the restaurant bought her excuse for a second, but as usual they let her off the hook. It wasn’t like she could tell anyone the truth about who she was and what she did at night. At the end of her shift she quit, telling Harry she’d found a better job. He demanded her cell phone and put his number in her phone book app and when she stepped toward the door, he stopped her. “Girl, call me if you need me. You’d be surprised how much I understand.” She nodded at his cryptic goodbye and walked out.

The bartender pushed a full shot glass in front of her along with the rest of the bottle. The scent of pine entered the dive bar, but she refused to see who it belonged to. She

wasn't a fool and knew she'd been followed. And whoever had literally pulled her ass out of the fire last night was now in this room somewhere. The truth was she was caught between being annoyed, slightly nervous, and amazed as parts south of her belly warmed. A bizarre reaction considering she hadn't even laid eyes on him yet.

The stool next to her was pulled out and the aroma from last night wafted into her personal space. She closed her eyes, her head a little foggy after four shots of vodka in quick succession. Clean—that was Haven's first thought as she inhaled again. Clean like the air after a cool summer shower. She hid the pleasure of what her neighbor's scent did to her. He wouldn't understand her sense of smell.

She glanced toward the delicious scent, which was wreaking all kinds of havoc in her body. She certainly didn't see what she expected to see. The bar was home to roughnecks and bikers, but sitting next to her was a guy who looked like he belonged on a college campus. Maybe not—he was definitely older than your average college kid, but he had former frat boy written all over him, from his Michigan State green-and-white sweatshirt and well-worn jeans down to his spotless white running shoes.

His light brown hair was cut short and had the slightest curl to it. It looked so soft that Haven fought to keep from running her hands through it to see what it would feel like. He turned to face her. His steel blue eyes crinkled in the corners from the smile he wore.

This was *so* not the person who'd come to her rescue last night. He looked out of place here and it only belied the fact he was from a much different side of the tracks.

She didn't bother acting coy. His smile broadened and she wanted to fall into the depths of those cool blue eyes. His skin was smooth with the barest amount of stubble. *Someone forgot to shave today.*

Haven normally didn't have such a visceral reaction to a man, but with his good-boy looks and his even cleaner smell, her body was screaming at her to open her mouth and talk.

"Can I get you another?" He pointed to her shot glass and the almost empty bottle of vodka. Haven opened her mouth, then closed it. She was never ever at a loss for words but no sound would come out, so finally she nodded her head. *Real smooth Haven, you've got a hottie sitting next to you, offering to buy you a drink and all you can do is a lame imitation of a fish out of water.*

He signaled for the bartender to pour her another and Haven managed to stop him. "Just a Labatt's. I've had my quota of shots."

"So did you get into it with the last guy who asked to buy you a drink?"

Haven actually blushed as she remembered how she must look to him. "Something like that, only it wasn't me he was insulting." She tried desperately to sound at ease but the truth was she'd be more comfortable fighting off a few men at the moment. Intimate small talk had never been her strong suit.

"I see. Superwoman, huh?"

The bartender plopped her beer in front of her. "Hardly Superwoman, just a girl who doesn't like to see other women pushed around. Besides, I had help."

He picked up his own beer. "Mmmm. It doesn't look like your help did you much good." His smile was infectious.

"You'd be wrong. I might not be in this lovely place tonight had I not been rescued." *For crying out loud, she was actually flirting with this guy. She knew he was the one*

who'd helped her, unless there was new cologne that smelled like the forest.

"So did you thank your brave knight in shining armor?" His teasing made her want to laugh.

"Never got the chance. He ran off like a thief in the night." She smiled. *The clichés were getting bad.*

"Ahh, a selfless protector who wants to remain anonymous." His laugh wrapped around her like a warm blanket.

Haven put her elbow on the bar. "And here I thought chivalry was dead."

"So how exactly would you thank your protector?" His question was playful but the lust in his eyes was dangerous. She'd had just enough to drink to let down her guard, just enough. If this guy was out to hurt her he sure wouldn't have saved her ass last night.

"Hard to say. How would you like a woman to thank you if you were a man like that?" She *wanted* him to tell her how to thank him.

He scratched his stubbled chin. "I guess dinner might work. Maybe a long walk. I'm pretty easy if the woman is worth it."

Haven cocked an eyebrow. "Are you kidding? Dinner and a walk?"

He scowled. "You don't believe me?"

She shrugged. "Sure I believe you. I'm just surprised."

He leaned forward. "Why does that surprise you?"

He was so close his minty breath caressed her cheek. She leaned even closer. "I guess I'm used to men wanting a more physical kind of thank you."

His eyes widened but he didn't move. "I must be special then, wouldn't you agree?"

Oh hell yeah. I'm hot and bothered and ready to do him on the bar. "I don't know you, so I can't say if you're special or not."

He lifted his bottle of beer. "Then here's to finding out if I'm special." He winked and she couldn't help but join him in his toast.

He stuck out his hand. "Adam Lawrence."

She didn't hesitate to take his hand. "Haven Smith." She held on for a second too long. His grip was firm but gentle and Haven forced herself to drop her hand. She wasn't sure if it was the alcohol but she found herself leaning closer to him. His clean, fresh scent called to a primal part of her, the part that had nothing to do with fighting and pain. The part that promised pleasure. She felt it with such longing it shocked her into realizing how long it had been since she'd enjoyed the company of a man.

The fact he was the absolute opposite of the kind of man she normally kept time with only seemed to increase the temperature in the room. He wasn't even claiming to be the one who helped her. Hell, he didn't have a mark on him that she could see. The men she knew wouldn't hesitate to take credit for what Adam had done. His behavior drew her like a bee to honey. Haven took a long drink of her beer and set the bottle down with a little too much force.

Last night she'd been terrified she was going to die. This man had saved her but wasn't taking credit. There was obvious heat arcing between the two of them. Her body was in overdrive, her nipples hard and her core on fire. Why not see if the hottie wanted to spend some serious alone time together? Since she wasn't like most women, if frat boy Adam got out of line she could handle it.

He looked so out of place in the dark bar, his appearance was like a cooling balm to the heat of Haven's longing. She wanted to forget the evil that lived outside these doors,

that hurt women and children and fed on misery. Oh, she knew not every place in the world housed so many assholes, but this was where she'd chosen to live. Chosen to rid the world of aforementioned assholes.

Still, she wouldn't mind forgetting for just a little while, losing herself in the big body sitting next to her.

Chapter Three

Adam couldn't take his eyes off of Haven Smith—in fact he couldn't have looked away even if he wanted to. She was a heady combination of strength with a hint of vulnerability. Her face was marred black and blue, with a cut across the bridge of her nose and one along her bottom lip. She made him want to lick every single bump and bruise she bore. He needed to caress her face, press her against him, lose himself in her heat, in her fighting spirit. Her coffee-colored eyes were filled with hunger, as if she was ready to eat him whole. It made his dick rock hard and he was barely able to leash the onslaught of lust coursing through his veins.

He'd been tailing her for a month, dispatched by his Alpha Nolan—who was also her brother—to keep watch on her and find out as much as possible about her life—until the time came when Nolan wanted her back home.

Not that she needed any watching over, at least in the physical sense. She was a true fighter. He'd watched her kick the shit out of abusers numerous times. She was a methodical fighter, almost detached from any kind of anger. She would play with her foes, insult and tease them into making a mistake. She took full advantage when those mistakes were made. He'd been prepared to step in at any time but it was never called for until last night.

He'd wanted to stop her from entering the abandoned house; his gut had screamed of danger. Keeping well behind her, he'd followed her in and caught the scent of another wolf. It was hard to pick up on, but Adam was one of the best trackers in the pack. By the time he reached the top of the stairs Haven was sailing through the air and into the wall.

His anger had been almost uncontrollable when he witnessed the male wolf crawl up her body. His own wolf took over and he was able to grab the bastard by the back of his neck and haul him out the door when she bucked him off. They'd tumbled down the stairs and the asshole ran for his life. Too bad he couldn't outrun Adam. He'd bagged the man and called Nolan for a pick up. He almost felt sorry for the bastard. By the time Nolan was through there wouldn't be much of him left.

Adam's gaze was drawn to her small hands. They weren't smooth and creamy; instead they were the hands of a woman who worked hard every day. He admired the hell out of her. She worked a crap waitressing job during the day and played havoc on perpetrators at night. She rarely took a night off—she was always looking for the next victim to save.

He'd never met a male or female more driven to do good for others. She'd often take the ones she saved to a large storefront where they'd enter and never come back out. He'd found out later the storefront was just that—a front. The basement beneath the building housed an enormous shelter, the kind that smuggled women and children out of the state and even the country to start a new life. The owner, Fatima Duraj, was the only person Haven spent any time with, and even then it was almost always business.

He hadn't been able to discover anything else about Haven except that when he was near her, his body reacted like a horny teenager. All he could think about was carrying her off to his bed and spending weeks pleasuring and being pleased by her.

He was a smart man and knew she wouldn't just allow that to happen. His wolf

howled with the desire to sweep her up and take her away from all the decay that surrounded her. He was in constant battle with his protective nature and the knowledge she would never ask for help from anyone.

He kept nothing from his alpha, especially when it came to Nolan's long-lost sister. Nolan had only instructed him to watch over her until it was time to bring her home. After last night's close call Nolan wanted her back. Now, sitting next to her, listening to her soft husky voice, with her sweet lilac scent filling his nose, he was loath to try to convince her to go to her brother. A brother she'd never met, a brother he knew would try to control her.

*

"So Adam, I live just around the corner. How would you like to walk me home?" *Oh shit.* She was a little tipsy. Inviting a complete stranger to her apartment was a dumbass thing to do, but she could handle herself. This man turned her on in a big way. She certainly didn't feel any guilt about her healthy sexual appetite, so why not take advantage of it?

His big blue eyes widened and took on the look of a predator, something Haven hadn't noticed during their brief conversation. Instead of setting off her alarms, his gaze lit fire to the kindling heat simmering in her belly. She wanted to reach out and touch him, feel the skin housed under the sweatshirt.

"Do you always ask strangers to walk you home?" His smile didn't quite reach his eyes. If she wasn't a little tipsy she might have sworn she saw concern burning in his steely gaze. This was preposterous. This man didn't know her at all, but she liked the look of him. She liked the way he looked at her even better. He'd come to her defense last night yet hadn't taken advantage of that fact. Hell, he hadn't even admitted he was there. Truthfully, everything about him was a total turn on, from the top of his light brown hair to the bottom of his shoes.

No one besides Harry and Fatima ever looked after her. She'd forbade Fatima to worry about her and since her friend knew what she was, it was easy enough for her to be more concerned with the females Haven brought into the shelter.

Leaning her chin on her hand, she reached out, touching the soft cotton of his shirt. "Actually I don't. I guess you're just lucky this evening." He didn't respond to her touch, nor was he smiling anymore. "Hey, forget it." Haven hopped off the stool. "If you're not interested I can deal with it."

She beat it out of the bar, her face burning. *What the hell was I thinking?* The truth was, she'd never propositioned a man before and apparently she sucked at it. She headed out the door but didn't make it two feet before she was caught from behind. She automatically swung her arm up, trying to break contact, but the grip on her remained firm.

Swinging her head around Haven sucked in a breath as she came face to face with Adam. He slowly backed her into a light post. "I never gave you an answer. You can't make that kind of an offer to a man and then disappear into the night."

Haven was momentarily knocked off kilter; she'd been unable to break his hold on her. Her mind was telling her to take a step back but her body was not listening to anything other than the erratic beat of her heart.

Adam's thumb rose and stroked her chin, a small gesture that made her practically pant. Her hands curled around his biceps, squeezing hard. His muscles were rock hard

and felt impenetrable. She gave an involuntary shiver when his thumb crossed her bottom lip in a feather-light caress.

“Your eyes are incredible.” She totally was out of her element. The deep timbre of his voice slid down her body and made her shiver. Her wolf was whining inside her. It wanted to bed this man in the worst kind of way and was losing patience.

He moved in closer and she met him halfway. His head lowered as he gave her the barest kiss along her lips. In that instant the dam broke and Haven buried her hand in his hair. His mouth came back down and crushed hers. She actually whined when his silky strands tickled her fingers. She gripped his hair tight in her fingers. It was as soft as she’d imagined and felt so good sliding through her hands.

His hands came around to cup her behind; his fingers dug deeply in her rounded ass. His tongue breathed new life into her. It was slick and moist and drew noises from her she’d never known she possessed.

Suddenly he yanked her up by her arms. “Wrap your legs around me and tell me where the hell your place is.”

Haven held onto his shoulders and jumped up, her steel-toed boots locked behind his back. “One block south, first building on the right.” His lips never left hers as he walked quickly to where she’d directed. His strength bled through her, and he was strong. Haven wasn’t a lightweight by any stretch of the imagination but Adam carried her as though she weighed no more than a feather.

“Christ I never would have guessed you tasted this good.” His desire whispered along her skin. She was too far gone to pay much attention to anything he said other than the soothing tone of his voice. Instead she bit his lower jaw, eliciting a deep groan and making him break into a near run.

*

Adam held Haven tight, her curves molded his large frame perfectly. His cock hammered at the zipper of his jeans and his wolf was howling; he wanted to mount her and take her like only he could.

Her lips slid along his jaw, leaving tiny stinging bites in its wake. She was a pure sexual goddess dressed in black and wearing damn shitkickers, which were now digging into the base of his spine.

Adam welcomed the sharp pain; it kept him under control until they reached her building. Her directions were given between scorching kisses that had him contemplating taking her against the nearest wall.

When they stopped in front of her apartment, Haven jumped from his embrace and he let her go. She’d been surprised earlier when she couldn’t break his hold on her and the last thing he wanted to do was spook her.

The admission of who he was would come, but not now. No, right now he had to sink into this woman. It went beyond an obsessive desire, it was like breathing, and he knew he was going to suffocate unless he possessed her.

Chapter Four

Her door was unlocked and she opened it without care. Adam frowned, this neighborhood was rough and the fact she didn't even bother locking her door pissed him off. It didn't matter if she was stronger than any human, there were more things running around in the night than shifters and humans. Adam'd bet his paycheck she'd never run into anything other than a human until the other night.

She hadn't been able to identify his scent as shifter and that alone was a dangerous vulnerability. She had a lot to learn and he was going to make damn sure she went to Nolan. It was the only place he knew for sure she'd be safe.

Her hands slid under his sweatshirt, bringing Adam out of his protector mode and back into the sweetest moment he could remember having. The tips of her fingers were rough from her days at the diner and her nights hunting assholes. They scraped his chest as they made circles around his torso.

He looped his hands around her back, effectively trapping her hands on his chest, then leaned down, his tongue darting out to taste her full lower lip. He caught her sigh and swallowed the sound as he sucked her tongue and grabbed her hip, backing her into the wall.

She parted her thighs and Adam stepped between them, grinding his pelvis against hers. He shoved her shirt up, encountering her cotton sports bra, which made him smile. If he'd learned anything about her, it was that she was pragmatic. He figured she was able to fight easier in the bra versus a frilly lace contraption most women went for. He released her breast from under her bra. It was full and filled his large hand. His thumb skated across her nipple and she moaned. The husky sound slid down his spine and straight to his cock.

Adam lowered his head to capture her nipple in his mouth. Her fingers clasped his hair and held on tight. Fuck, but she tasted like paradise. He circled her nipple with his tongue before nipping it.

She pushed at his arms, causing him to let go of her. He quickly looked up; her chest was heaving and the smell of her need fed him. He straightened and traced her chin with one finger. Adam went back for another kiss, but her eyes widened and she growled, pushing him hard, sending him skidding across the floor and into the coffee table.

*

Haven braced herself for a fight with Adam. Just her luck, she'd met a hot guy and he turned out to be like her, *a fucking wolf*. When his blue eyes had become shocked with golden flecks and glowed, she recognized the look. She saw it often enough in her reflection whenever she chanced a look after a night of fighting.

She'd promised her mother she'd never try to find any shifters, and she'd kept her vow until tonight. Marion had lectured her enough on how rough and wild male shifters were, especially when they were horny. Adam had risen from the floor and she braced herself for impact.

The expected blow never came. Instead he moved around the broken table and sat down on her thrift store couch. A sheepish grin lit his face. "I guess you know what I am." It wasn't a real question but she answered anyway.

“Not until your eyes went all crazy on me. Did you know all along who I was?” She wanted to believe he had no clue what she was, but knew better.

Adam nodded his head. “Yeah, I know who you are. You’re Haven Victoria Alexander, born October second. You have a big brother who has been looking for you for a long time.”

Haven sucked in a breath. “You’re wrong. I don’t have any family. I am a product of rape.”

“Is that what *she* told you? That she was raped by your father?”

She crossed her arms. Adam had become sarcastic and she sure as hell didn’t like it.

“She lied to you.”

Now he’d gone too far. While Marion had her faults, she could never have made up such a story.

“Get the fuck out of here.” Her anger heated to the boiling point. “I don’t know where you’re getting your information, but you’re wrong.”

Adam reached in his pocket and pulled out small envelope, tossing it on the remnants of the table. Some photographs and a small folded-up piece of paper fell out. “Look for yourself. You’re part of a much larger family.”

Haven scanned his face but could read nothing in it. His eyes had cooled back to blue, and his jaw was tense.

She looked down to the photos he’d set on the broken table. She’d never been good at playing games. Cautiously she made her way around the table, careful not to get too close to him as she snatched the pictures up.

The first picture was a professional family portrait. She recognized herself and her mother right away. Out of place were two tiny baby girls wearing matching pale pink taffeta dresses perched on her mother’s lap. Hell, even Haven, who couldn’t have been more than two, was wearing a silk baby-blue dress with a ribbon in her hair. Her mother was beautiful in the portrait, wearing what had to be a designer dress in eggshell, and on her ring finger was a rock that must have cost a small fortune.

Standing behind the women was a large handsome man. His dark hair was cut short, his nose straight just like her own. He had Haven caught up in one of his arms. His other hand was placed on Marion’s shoulder. There was also a boy who looked a few years older than her whose smile showed a gap where his two front teeth were missing. The family in the picture could have been plucked straight out of Haven’s dreams.

She let the picture fall to the floor and quickly thumbed through the rest. Various holidays, vacations and a few other photos showing a large happy family looked back at her.

“This doesn’t prove anything.” She dropped the rest of the pictures. “Abused women learn to hide their pain every single day, and my mother was no different.” Haven’s anger diminished somewhat as a deep sense of sadness invaded her being. Had her mother lied to her all those years ago? No, Marion would never do that to her. Despite her faults, she was sure her mother had loved her. Adam slid a folded piece of paper across the table. “Read this. I think it may change your mind.”

She reached for the paper. Her hand was unsteady as she tried her damndest not to let Adam see how shaken she was.

Unfolding the paper Haven realized it was an old letter. It was yellowed and the folds had worn some of the ink. A knot formed in her stomach as she recognized her

mother's handwriting. The note was short and sweet and drove the knife deeper into her belly.

Arlen,

I have all three girls. You can see them for one hundred thousand dollars and a monthly allowance of ten thousand dollars. You will regret it if you don't pay me.

Marion

She shook her head. "No, this can't be true. My mother told me she was beaten and raped, that my father was a horrible creature."

"Your father was a great man. Arlen Alexander never laid a finger on your mother in anger." Haven's head shot up as Adam spoke.

"Arlen Alexander, are we talking about the same Arlen Alexander who founded the wolf sanctuaries? The same one who happens to be one of the richest people in America. *He* was a shifter?"

"Yes, the very same, and you're one of his heirs." His voice grew soft. He was being very careful with her. Haven sensed his change; before he'd been angry, but now he was acting as if she was a rabid dog ready to jump him.

She bristled, but in truth she was being pulled in a thousand directions. Adrenalin, unquenched desire and the newfound knowledge that her entire life was one big fat lie was too much for her to deal with. The beast was rising again within her, trying to come to her aid whenever she was in trouble. It was the last straw. She ran into the bathroom and slammed the door, locking it behind her.

She stared at herself in the mirror, her brown eyes glowed an iridescent shade of gold and brown. Desperate, she opened the medicine cabinet, taking out a single razor blade and sat on the toilet, turning away from the mirror.

Chapter Five

Adam didn't go after her though every bone in his body demanded it. He'd dropped one hell of a bomb on her so he let her be. Giving her time to digest their conversation, he picked up the pictures as well as the note and placed them on her small kitchen counter. He set about cleaning up her broken table, trying to ignore his throbbing side from the kick she'd given him. The more Adam learned about Haven, the more he found himself admiring her toughness and compassion. With the mess gone, he went to the bathroom door and knocked lightly. "Haven, do you need anything?"

"Get the hell out of here." Her voice was hoarse and strained. Adam's nose lifted slightly, *blood*.

"What the hell is going on?" Adam panicked. Something was wrong, very wrong. She didn't reply.

He slammed his body against the thin wooden door. The wood split as the door flew open. Sitting on the toilet was Haven, a razor blade in her hand and her arm bleeding from her wrist to her elbow.

"What the fuck are you doing?" She refused to meet his eyes. Swearing, Adam grabbed a towel from the rack. Quickly wetting it, he went to his knees, plucking the blade from Haven's limp fingers before gently washing the blood away.

"Oh damn baby, why did you do this?" The life seemed to have seeped from her. There was no fight left as she sat limply in front of him. He examined her arm; the cuts were shallow and already healing. It didn't make him feel any better. He felt nauseous; he felt helpless. He wanted to wrap her up and take her away. Keep her away from her life, her fighting and her past.

He slid his hand through her hair and carefully cupped her head. He tipped her chin with his other hand. "Haven, why did you do this?"

"Stops the change. I can't change." Her words were slow and sluggish. "I promised Mom I would never change into my wolf."

He wanted to throw his head back and howl with rage. What her mother had asked of her was unacceptable. *Haven had never shifted*. He couldn't even comprehend how that was even possible until his eyes caught the cuts along her arm.

She was harming herself to keep from changing and it broke his heart. "You need some rest. We'll talk about this later."

He put one arm around her waist and another under her knees. Straightening, he held her in his arms, close to his chest. She never uttered a word as he carried her into the bedroom. She remained limp when he placed her onto the mattress. The combination of alcohol and finding out the truth about her mother had done a fucking number on her.

Adam removed her boots. His hands went to the zipper on her pants but he stopped himself. She might be more comfortable out of her clothes but he wasn't going to undress her without permission. From what he knew about Haven, her pride would be stung if he saw her unclothed without invitation.

She didn't lose control—ever—that much was clear. She allowed nothing to happen that she didn't let happen and he wasn't going to take advantage of her when she was in distress. He pulled a blanket over her, tucking it around her body. He leaned down and

gently kissed her brow. He moved to the other side of the bed and laid down on top of the blanket. He moved up against her back. He wrapped his arm around her, pulling her as close as the blanket between them would allow. He nuzzled her hair, inhaling her sweet scent. She didn't speak a word, and the only movement she made was when her hand pressed his hand closer to her stomach. With that one small gesture he was a goner.

The vulnerability and trust she gave him in that small movement sealed his fate. Convincing her she belonged with him would be one hell of a feat, but he was a stubborn man and they had all the time in the world.

He lay with her until her breathing was slow and steady. He gently removed his hand, not wanting to wake her.

Nolan was going to be pissed as hell. Adam hated the fact he had to be the one to inform his alpha of what her life had been like up to this point, the lies Marion had made her believe.

He took off his shoes and shirt and sat back on the couch. His body was still humming with the craving to touch her, to hold her and to taste her. He was also ready to kick anyone's ass if they ever tried to harm her. He knew she wouldn't want his protection, but that was too damn bad, because she was going to get it. He winced as he realized that he sounded like a whipped dog. His sister Lila would laugh her ass off if she could see him now; she'd always warned him that the day would come when a woman would bring him to his knees. She was really going to get a kick out of the fact Haven was unlike any woman he'd ever gone out with. She wasn't tall, lithe and blonde like he normally preferred. No, she was shorter, with curves to die for, deep brown hair and even darker eyes. She didn't wear designer clothes or high heels but she was stunning and she possessed qualities he hadn't known he'd find so attractive. She was more a woman than any he'd ever known.

He exhaled deeply and flipped open his cell. He had an unpleasant conversation ahead of him.

*

Haven woke to the smell of frying bacon and eggs. Her stomach growled, letting her know it'd been too long since she eaten. She sat up and rubbed her eyes, letting them adjust to the morning sun peeking through the blinds.

Adam's scent mixed with that of the food and caused a mixed reaction of desire and hunger. She swung her legs over the side of the bed and stood. She was still dressed in her clothes from yesterday. The fact he'd left her dressed last night made her smile.

She wasn't sure if she should be thankful he was such a gentleman or insulted that he'd kept her clothes on. She hated feeling so confused, the back and forth in her brain since she'd met him was exhausting. She went into the bathroom to wash her face, brush her teeth and try and tame her hair enough to put it in a ponytail before she joined him in the kitchen. She wanted to be pissed that he was still here, but the truth was she couldn't muster any anger toward the man.

He was the complete opposite of every male she'd ever encountered and it kept her on her toes. Walking into the tiny kitchen, she sat at the small white, plastic table she'd picked up at the thrift store. The damn thing belonged on a patio but it served her needs.

Adam continued cooking bacon; he'd obviously gone for groceries at some point. She rarely ate at home, eating most of her meals at the diner or at the shelter with Fatima.

"Here." Adam passed her a hot mug of coffee. She mumbled a thank you, sipped the

blessed liquid and watched him as he continued cooking breakfast. He hummed as he worked, not trying to engage her in conversation. She was glad he wasn't forcing her into small talk. Pleasantries really weren't her thing, but his voice soothed her while he hummed. Since his attention was turned elsewhere it gave her the time to take stock of him and his body in the light of day.

This morning he appeared much broader than he had last night in the dark bar. His shoulders were wide, his torso strong. Hell, he was built like a hockey player. Not too bulky, lean in muscle but she knew without a doubt what kind of strength was housed beneath his golden skin.

His hands were large and quite adept with cooking as he easily sliced a couple of pears. She'd never been much of a cook and found she enjoyed watching him work. He went in search of plates and found the only two she owned. They were mismatched and came from the thrift store, like most of the things in her apartment. Oh, she'd had plenty at one point, but after smashing set after set trying to release her anger instead of cutting, she'd decided not to bother replacing them until she was completely out.

He joined her at the table with two plates piled high with food. He pushed one in front of her and sat down in the other chair.

"I want to meet my brother." She winced as her statement came out more demanding than she'd intended.

Adam smiled. "Good morning to you too."

Her face burned. "I'm sorry. I'm not much for small talk." She slipped a fork full of eggs into her mouth before she said something else really stupid.

"I know you're not, relax. I talked to Nolan last night. He wants us to be at his place today." He sipped his coffee. "We just have to wait for his call. He's out of town on business and is flying in this morning."

"What did you tell him?" She wanted to add 'about me' but didn't.

"Everything." His answer was instantaneous, as though she were asking a ridiculous question.

"*Everything?*" Surely he hadn't mentioned they almost had sex last night.

Adam put down his fork down. "I told him everything that happened last night from the moment I met you at the bar until I put you to bed."

She pushed her plate away and moved back from the table. "Some things are meant to be private." She crossed her arms and glared.

"I don't keep things from my alpha. He asked what happened and I told him. I'm not ashamed that I kissed you last night. He knows it and he also knows what I still plan to do."

"Really. What is it you plan on doing. Adam?" She didn't care at this point if she sounded like a shrew. When it came to her love life or lack thereof she wasn't happy that a man she never met knew what she and Adam had shared. It didn't matter that not much happened beyond a few kisses. Sure, they were mind-blowing, stunning kisses that left her weak-kneed and dizzy but she didn't want Nolan knowing her business even if he was her brother.

Adam stood and walked around the table until he stood before her. He placed his large hands on her shoulders. "What I plan on doing is making love with you until neither one of us can stand. Then I plan on doing it again and again and again."

Her breath lodged firmly in her throat as his eyes sparkled and his scent invaded her

personal space. “What makes you think I want you to ever touch me again?”

God she sounded so weak; what she really wanted was to jump on him and fuck him on top of the table.

His hands moved down and gripped her still-folded arms. “You forget what we are, Haven. I can smell your desire growing stronger the closer I get. You tremble just the slightest bit, but to me it feels like an earthquake. I want you, I want to be inside you and I know you want the same thing.”

He pulled her up. “I’m so hard for you right now I feel like I’m going to burst if I’m not buried inside of you within the next ten seconds. You’re a smart woman. You’re not about to deny you want me too.”

Haven shook her head. “No, I’m not going to deny it. What’s the point? But I’m not sure where you think this is going after the bombshell you dropped last night.”

His face lowered, his breath skimmed her bottom lip when he whispered, “You’ve been thinking way too fucking long. Now act like the wolf you are and follow your instincts.”

*

Adam wasn’t prepared for his legs to be swept out from under him and he wasn’t given the chance to catch his breath before Haven straddled his thighs. He remained still long enough to let her think she had him under control. He felt her relax and grasped her waist, flipping their positions. She tried desperately to slide out from under him, but he managed to grab her wrists in his hands and pin them to the linoleum.

“So you like to play rough, baby?”

“I don’t know. It’s not like I’ve ever been able to go full out while doing it. I was always too afraid I’d hurt the guy.” She gave a small shrug.

He closed his eyes and opened them quickly. “Fuck. You’ve even held back when making love.” It filled him with anger that at every turn Haven hid her true self.

“Orgasms are a great way to soothe my wolf. It’s never been making love, it’s always about easing my pain. I fuck when I need to.” Her matter-of-fact position on sex did not sit well with him. Part of him was angry at her for not taking care of herself, for burying every instinct she had. He was pissed at her mother for stealing her away. Hell, he was even angry at her late father for not doing more to locate her.

He had no words to give, so instead he slammed his lips against hers in a bruising kiss.

Her body went limp and her mouth opened in invitation to his. He sighed with satisfaction and slipped his tongue into her sweet mouth. He slowed the kiss down, thoroughly exploring the soft recesses of her mouth. She kissed him back just as slowly, just as thoroughly. He ground his pelvis into her stomach, his rock-hard dick rubbing the soft skin through her t-shirt. He let go of her hands, roughly moving down to the hem of her shirt. His eyes followed his hands as he pushed the offensive shirt up her torso. She helped him strip it off and he inhaled deeply as he caught sight of her bare breasts.

They were larger than most; her tight nipples were flushed dark rose, making his mouth water. He lowered his head and licked one pebbled tip. Haven’s moan echoed in the sparse kitchen, driving him to capture the nub between his teeth. He wanted to hear her moan louder and deeper. She drove her hands through his hair, clinging tight and pulled his head harder against her.

A low rumble escaped—he couldn’t stop the natural response he was having toward

her. She was sexy and wild and driving him up the fucking wall. Her hands skimmed down his chest, raking her nails across as she went. He bit down harder on her nipple when she reached the button on his jeans. She yelped and tore at the closure, finally opening the button and managing to push the jeans down his thighs.

He mimicked her moves, stripping her pants from her; it was awkward and not quite so sexy but he didn't care. Rational thought left when all his blood moved south. Her panties lasted two seconds before he ripped them from her. It was his turn to yelp when her long fingers freed his cock and guided it between her legs. "Oh God, Haven... Haven... slow down."

"No," she cried. "I need you to fill me up now." Adam was unable to take his own advice the minute her fingers led his cock to her wet entrance. He kissed his way up her slender throat. He placed both hands on either side of her head and thrust hard. They moaned in unison as he filled her in one movement. Her long legs tightened around him, locking him to her. Adam wanted to slow his thrusts, but his body had other plans as he pushed in even further. He couldn't get deep enough, fast enough. Her body molded itself tightly around his dick, demanding he continue his driving thrusts.

His wolf started howling in his head, insisting he mark her, rut her harder, make her his. She met his every movement with one of her own. Her hips rose to meet him, her nails scratching down his back. Her eyes took on the familiar glow of a she-wolf, their hazel depths bleeding into forest green, brown and gold. She was fucking beautiful to behold. "Oh shit. What's happening?"

He felt the panic take hold of her as she stiffened and he knew his own eyes had changed." Haven... Haven it's going to be okay."

She continued to struggle, and the terror in her eyes stopped him cold. He brushed her hair off her forehead. "Haven, breathe deeply. Baby talk, to me."

"I don't want to change." She'd stopped fighting him but was clearly on edge.

"You won't change. Remember, you just told me this soothes your wolf. It's normal, perfectly normal."

*

Haven wanted to believe him, but this felt so different than any other sexual experience. She felt the truth, saw it in his face. Adam hid nothing from her, even the fact that he'd told her brother he was going to have sex with her. She knew in her soul that he wasn't trying to deceive her. The panic died down and her body started responding again to Adam being buried in her. She was either going to trust this man or spend the rest of her life regretting.

Her decision was made and she used the adrenaline humming through her to push her hips up. Her pussy clamped tightly around his arousal and she locked her legs even tighter around him.

He smiled and whispered "Thank you." She grabbed his head and kissed him with the care and passion he'd shown her.

"Harder." Her hands slid down and dug into his ass, urging him to go faster. He moved fully into her and backed out, slamming himself to the hilt. She hitched her legs even higher, wanting him deep. His body moved in a blistering rhythm in long, full thrusts.

"You feel so good, baby," he said through clenched teeth. Her body broke out in a fine sheen of sweat. His became slick as well, she dug her short nails into his skin to get a

better hold.

Adam came up on his hands, his head thrown back. She held her breath as she watched his face change with every push and pull he made. Letting go of his ass, she grasped her nipples, pinching them, reaching for the gratification she needed like her next breath.

He looked down and smiled. “Pinch them harder, baby, show me how you like it.” She pulled the tips harder, her pussy wetter than she’d ever experienced. She loved how his eyes glowed with every tug she made.

He lowered his head and licked the tip of one breast. She held it out for him to suckle into his mouth. His teeth nipped hard before licking more gently. He continued playing with her breasts as his thrusts slowed.

She moved one hand between their bodies and rubbed her clit. He straightened, pulling her legs up so her feet rested on his shoulders.

“You do like a show, don’t ya?” He nodded and slowed to the point of barely moving. She wanted to scream in frustration, but instead slid her finger inside of her. His cock jumped as it shared her pussy with her finger. She loved the hard and slick feel of his dick as her finger delved a little deeper, stretching her a little wider.

“Damn, woman, you’re killing me.” He moved the fingers playing with her clit out of the way, replacing them with his own. Now it was her turn to jump; electricity leapt from his skin to hers as he teased her tight bud, swelling it even more.

Smiling, she cupped his balls, the position awkward but worth it as he sucked in a deep breath and ground himself into her.

Grasping her wrists, he removed her hands and raised them above her head. Laying fully on her, he pounded back into her. Her body demanded his rougher thrusts. Her muscles tightened to the point that she wasn’t about to let him slip out or slow down anymore. She wanted to come now!

A tingle broke somewhere deep within her belly and shot to every nerve ending in her pelvis. She wrapped her arms around him, her nails scraping down his spine as she rode out the wave of heat rolling through her. Her back arched as she fell headfirst into a spiral of pleasure. Her entire body contracted as her orgasm broke loose. In response, Adam threw his head back and howled as he filled her.

They were both slick from the heat they’d created and their shared orgasm. Adam moved to his side, pulling her close. His arms came around her as the sexual adrenaline seeped away.

They were quiet as they caught their breaths. She closed her eyes, trying to think of something to say. She’d never been good with men, she always felt awkward after sex. She was completely unable to ease into pillow talk. The silence stretched on and he didn’t say anything. Maybe he wasn’t much of a talker after sex either. He seemed completely content to just hold her.

Then his phone went off, taking away the urge to say something. He reached down near her, fumbling for his cell. “Hello... Yes... hour and a half.” His words were clipped and the conversation lasted a whole twenty seconds.

The phone clicked shut and Haven turned on her back.

“That was Nolan. He’s back at the house and ready to see you.”

Reality came whizzing back and the euphoric state she’d been in disappeared. “I need to take a shower.” She jumped up and practically ran to the bathroom. She liked

Adam's smell on her—he reminded her of all the good things in the world. But she needed to meet her brother on her own two feet, not bathed in Adam's scent.

* * * *

They walked back to the bar in silence. Adam's truck was still parked on the street. She smiled when he let out a string of oaths while pulling the parking ticket off his window. He came around to her side and tried to open the door for her, but Haven was faster and did it herself. She smiled again as he scowled at her; she wasn't trying to be difficult but it felt weird to have a man open doors for her when she was used to doing everything on her own.

He got in the truck, starting it up. Country music blasted out of the speakers and Haven cringed. She was an AC/DC kind of girl, not a Clint Black one.

"We'll be there in about an hour. It's funny how long Nolan's been looking and when he finally finds you, you're barely an hour from him."

"I've lived here my whole life. I don't know why he'd have such a difficult time tracking me down."

"Marion was sending letters postmarked from all over the country and once from Peru. Obviously she sent Arlen on a wild goose chase. When Nolan took over he started from the beginning of the first letter and retraced his father's steps."

Haven couldn't imagine how in the hell her mother managed to send letters postmarked from anywhere besides where they lived.

"He came across an old obituary of your mother and realized she was buried down here. He sent me to investigate and I found you in about three days and reported back to him that you were alive and well."

"How long ago was that?"

Adam shrugged. "About a month ago."

"You've been following me for a month?" The question came out in a rush.

"Yes."

Haven felt sick; she'd been spied on for that long and never known with the exception of noticing his scent five nights ago. It stung her pride and made her question her ability to use her natural gifts.

"I can't believe you were around for so long and I didn't even notice. I never picked it up." What else had she missed? How many women and children had she walked past and never known if they were in trouble? Her stomach twisted in knots as she realized she wasn't as much of a bad ass as she thought.

Adam's large warm hand covered hers. He squeezed gently, prying her fingers apart and linking his with hers. "Haven, I'm a damn good tracker. I managed to stay downwind."

"Are you trying to comfort me? Make me feel better about the fact I'm not as smart as I thought? Don't feel sorry for me Adam. I hate being pitied."

His hand tightened painfully around hers. "You've got to stop thinking that I'm judging you every minute. I'm not. The last thing I feel for you is pity. I might regret that you were raised by that woman and had no clue you had a family. I admire what you've done with your life despite your childhood."

She snorted because she knew there was no way in hell Adam was this perfect. No man was. He tightened his grip, drawing her attention to him. "I admire that you've not

let life defeat you. While most would be wallowing in their own misery, you found a way to deal, so no, pity is not what I feel.”

Haven pulled her hand free and crossed her arms. “Everyone judges everyone, Adam. Don’t be naïve.” Damn, she sounded like a bitch.

The truck swerved, knocking Haven against the door. “What the hell are you doing?”

Adam didn’t answer as he drove off the main road and down a dirt one, dust kicking up behind the truck. Jerking the truck to a stop, he turned in his seat, unclicked her seat belt and grabbed her by the arms so fast she was dumbstruck.

“Listen, I get things have sucked for you. I get finding out you have a family and that your mother fucked you over makes you unhappy. But don’t make the mistake of putting me in that category with the rest of the fucked-up people you have known.” His eyes started to glow.

She tried to fight off his grasp but was unable to. Damn he was strong. “I’m sorry if I hurt your pride. I don’t *know* you. I only know what I’ve learned living *my* life. I don’t fit into your life.” She cried her outrage even though she knew he spoke the truth. He wasn’t like the people she grew up around and dealt with everyday. He was honorable, and kind, and way out of her league. She would bring him down, make him sorry he’d ever set eyes on her. She wasn’t selfish enough to do that, he deserved better.

He yanked her closer to him. “You don’t get to decide what I want in my life. I am a thirty-five year old wolf and I trust my instincts and right now my instincts are telling me to fuck you into oblivion.”

There was no chance for her to respond before his lips crushed hers. He pulled her into his lap, biting and nipping lips. “Christ, you drive me crazy, woman.”

Haven opened her mouth beneath his, driving her own tongue between his hungry lips. Her hand threaded through his thick brown hair, catching on the slight curls she pulled hard enough to make him grunt. Her other hand slid between them and cupped the hard ridge in his jeans.

She was on fire, her body yearning for his touch. Haven had never been so desperate for the touch of another person. Adam was different, he wasn’t intimidated or turned off by her surliness, and in fact he was often amused by her. His ability to remain calm was a balm to her anger, but here and now with his own temper seething she was even more attracted to him. His savage hunger biting down on her throat, his rough hands pulling at the buttons on her shirt made her cream her panties. Even with them tearing at each other’s clothes he was gentle with his touch.

She removed her hands from his jeans and set to work on her own, shoving them as far down her thighs as possible. She moved back to his pants and released his hard cock. In the cramped quarters of the truck, with their clothes off just enough so that he could penetrate her, Haven moved over him. Straddling his thighs as much as her jeans allowed, she grasped his cock and guided it to her slick entrance. She closed her eyes and slowly slid down him, inch by inch.

The feeling was pure bliss and she knew without a doubt that this was as close to heaven as she would ever get. His hands reached around and cupped her ass; he squeezed and she threw her head back. Her breasts were pushed out and he took advantage of her position by placing his open mouth over the cotton of her shirt.

She rose and fell in tandem with every pull on her nipple Adam made.

“That’s it baby. Ride me, ride me hard.” Adam whispered over her nipple before shifting up to her mouth and kissing her gently. Their first time had been lightning fast, and this time was going almost as quickly—it drove him nutty. All he wanted to do was take her to his big warm bed and lay her down on his soft cotton sheets and spend the night showing her just how beautiful she was to him.

Her thighs tightened around him, hugging his cock in the most intimate of embraces. Her taste and scent were in his blood now and all he wanted was to be with her as much as possible. Convincing her of that was another matter, but Adam was a very determined kind of man. He felt bone-deep that she was his, it didn’t matter he’d only been with her for less than twenty-four hours, some things a man just knew. Haven was his—that was a fact. Convincing his vigilante lover was another matter altogether. He decided not to voice his thoughts yet; she’d run like hell if he did.

His hands tightened on her ass. “Haven, fuck, you feel so good, squeeze my cock.” He pushed up hard as she drove down on him. He lifted one hand to the back of her neck, pulling her face down to his. Her hot breath mingled with his as he drove deeper in her mouth with his tongue.

“Come on me baby, let me feel your sweet honey run down my balls.” His whispered words pushed her over the edge. Her pussy clamped him like a vice and she fell apart around him, driving him over the cliff with her.

* * * *

Haven managed to win the argument over the radio station after their unbelievable romp in the truck. She needed the music to hide what she was feeling. Devastated, torn apart, over the moon, exhilarated, and a million other bad adjectives a woman often thought of when her lover knocked her on her ass.

Adam was content with the music blaring at an ear-splitting decibel. Well, at least he wasn’t complaining about it. She wondered what it was like to have such an easygoing nature; a part of her was envious that he seemed to let things roll off his back without much thought.

“Here we go. The Alexander House, your family home.” Adam pointed up the long paved driveway he turned into.

Chapter Six

Haven's eyes widened. If he thought this was a family home then he needed to get out more often. He was driving toward a freaking mansion.

Sweat broke out on her brow. "Stop the truck." Nausea churned in her stomach. "What?"

"Stop the fucking truck" She was on the verge of panic. Adam slowed the truck to a stop. Haven threw the door open and jumped out. She managed to make it to the edge of the manicured lawn before letting her breakfast back up. With her stomach emptied, she concentrated on her breathing, trying desperately to get herself under control.

A bottle of water was thrust in front of her, and she gratefully grabbed the plastic container. She opened it and took two long gulps. Big mistake—as soon as the liquid went down her throat—it came right back up.

"Haven, sip it slowly." She refused to look at Adam but took his advice. She'd never been so damned embarrassed in her life. It didn't matter this man had taken her fast and hard twice today, being sick in front of him was way too intimate for her. She was uncomfortable in her weaknesses

His large hand gripped her shoulder and she tried to move from under it. The grip only became harder. "Snap out of it. It's just a house."

She turned to face him pointing to the *house*. "My entire apartment building can fit into that house. That's not a cozy little home, it's a monstrosity. It screams money and privilege..."

"It's not that bad. I think you may have the wrong idea about your brother." He gripped her arms. "Talk to me, I've been following you for a month. I've watched you beat the hell out of men twice your size without blinking. Why are you freaking out over a house?"

She wanted the ground to open up and swallow her whole, but knew he wasn't going to let go until she said something. She took a deep shaky breath. "I'm not used to all this. I live in a dumpy part of town. I work in a small diner and have one close friend. I was fine with my life as it was, but now I'm dealing with all of this." Her head began to pound. "I'm about to meet a brother I didn't know I had. Finding out my family is rich as hell makes things more complicated." She touched his face. "I don't think I'm prepared for all of this. I'm scared."

She eased out of Adam's hold, walking toward the truck. "I just need some time. Change isn't easy for me." She climbed back into the truck and slammed the door. Damn, she sounded like a baby. She never allowed herself to drown in self pity or the 'what ifs' of life. Yet here she was taking the doubt she felt about herself out on the one man who'd treated her with nothing but respect.

Things were the way they were and a person learned to live with what was thrown at them. Meeting Adam had opened up a whole new world for her. She knew virtually nothing about this man and yet she trusted him. In her book that made absolutely no sense and because of it she was at a disadvantage.

Matters of the heart were too complicated for most people and impossible for her. She was useless in that department. She worked her day job, and helped Fatima at night.

It was simple because she understood the rules. She took a deep breath and let it out. She'd had her freak-out moment. Now it was time to pull herself together.

* * * *

Adam rang the bell on the front door and it was answered by a small white-haired woman. "Adam." She clapped her hands together as she looked past him to Haven. "Is this her?"

He smiled. "Addy, this is Haven. Haven, this is your great aunt Adeline." Addy pushed past Adam and wrapped her thin arms around her.

"You have grown into such a beautiful woman. We have missed having you with us and Nolan is especially happy that you've come home."

The older lady would not let go of her hand as she let them into the house. She followed her Great Aunt, wanting to feel some connection to the woman, but unfortunately she didn't. Adam closed the door behind her and she was thankful to feel the heat of his body at her back. This was one time in her life when she needed the support of another person. She was nervous and scared, the emotions spiraling within her, and she prayed she wouldn't get sick again.

She barely took in her surroundings; her Aunt was talking non-stop about the house, about her father, but it wasn't registering with her. They approached a rich mahogany door.

Addy raised her hand and knocked lightly, then opened the door. "Nolan, she's here."

Her brother looked up from his computer and their eyes met. The sick feeling flourished as she stared into a pair of eyes exactly like hers. He said nothing for a moment, only continued to stare at her. She wanted to squirm under his close scrutiny. He removed his glasses and set them on the table.

"Leave us." His commanding tone brooked no refusal. Addy patted her arm and excused herself, Adam stepped closer. "You too, Adam."

She looked back at Adam. "I'll be fine." He kissed her temple and left the room.

Her attention snapped back to Nolan. "Are you always this bossy?" She waited for her brother to say something the least bit condescending; if he did she was out of here.

Instead of saying anything his lips twitched and broke into a smile. "You were just as bossy and defiant as a child." He stood and circled around the desk before folding her in light embrace. "Welcome home, sister."

She let herself breathe in his scent. She recognized the slightly musky odor and a fleeting memory flashed in her mind. She was spinning around in circles and laughing, the same scent surrounded her.

Instead of making her feel at ease it increased her fear. He knew all about her but she remembered nothing of him.

He stepped back. "Come and sit with me." His voice was pleasant as was his manner. He led them to a large brown leather couch. "After talking with Adam over the past day or so I imagine this is a bit overwhelming for you."

She shrugged. "You could say that. I don't remember you."

His dark eyes flashed gold and a slight rumble echoed in his chest. "So I've been told. Adam relayed what your mother told you. I hope you believe what you were told wasn't the truth."

She swallowed the lump in her throat. “I can’t ignore the letter or the resemblance. I’m having a hard time understanding why my mother would ever do something like that.”

“I remember her well, she was a beautiful woman. After they married Dad was ecstatic and thought she was truly happy. After the birth of the twins things went downhill fairly quickly. She spent money like it was water and would disappear for two or three days at a time.”

That sounded like her mother. Marion had never liked facing her problems and preferred shopping over responsibility. Haven recalled all the times her mother bought new clothes or shoes or whatever caught her eye. Spending all the rent money in favor of a designer purse—groceries weren’t a high priority on her list either.

Haven spent most of her time with an older neighbor lady who would feed her whenever Marion went out for the evening.

“Dad never stopped looking for you or the twins, ever.” The sadness in her brother’s eyes was heartbreaking.

“I don’t remember the twins either.” God, what had been wrong with her mother?

“They were given up for adoption a few weeks after she left with the three of you.”

“Do you know where they are?” The idea of having a large family warmed her to the core. Her sisters would know what she was feeling. She hadn’t realized until now how she longed for a familial connection.

“We found Liberty about two weeks ago, but we haven’t been able to locate Justice yet.” Haven squeezed her hands together to keep from grabbing Nolan’s arm. “I want to see my sister. I want to help find my other one.”

Nolan held up his hand. “I have someone watching Liberty and when the time is right we can go and get her.”

“Why can’t we get her now?” Maybe her brother wasn’t as much of a leader as Adam proclaimed.

The door to the office flew open and a tall willowy tornado with shoulder-length wheat-blond hair entered. Her high heels put her easily at six feet tall, her designer red dress and matching shoes cost more than Haven made in six months. She flung her length hair over one shoulder as she stopped in front of the couch.

“Is this her?” The question was in a husky squeal as the woman flung her arms tightly around Haven.

What the hell was going on with all the hugging around this damn place? Flowery, overwhelming perfume accosted Haven’s nose. She remained stiff in the stranger’s arms, remarkably uncomfortable with the woman’s blatant show of emotion...no wait, this *wolf*’s blatant show of emotion. Beneath the cloying perfume was the scent of pure shifter.

“Claudia, let her go.” Nolan swooped in for the save.

“Oh my, I’m so sorry.” She let Haven go and shimmied in between them, inserting her bony ass next to Haven. “When Nolan told me you were coming I couldn’t help the excitement. Poor baby. He’s been looking for you for so long. Now that he has you he’ll be able to get on with his own life.”

Haven’s hand balled into a loose fist. Whoever this woman was, she didn’t like her one bit. Overly made up, overly dressed and overly perfumed was the least of her problems. Insincerity dripped off her and poisoned the air in the room.

“Claudia, let Haven breathe a little. Be a good girl and entertain Adam while we talk.” *Oh! He did not just suggest this man-eater go and play nice with Adam.*

Claudia pouted her perfect red lips and Haven’s fist tightened further. “Okay Nolan, I suppose I’ve waited this long. I can wait a little longer.” She huffed, batting her baby blues, then turned and kissed him full on the mouth, taking her sweet old time. The urge to punch her in the back of the head was killing Haven. God she needed a drink, better yet, she needed Adam naked and under her.

Brother and sister both remained quiet as Claudia sashayed out the door.

“Who the hell was that?” The question popped out before she could stop herself. When was she going to learn to filter what she said?

“Claudia Miner is an old friend.” Her brother was clearly uncomfortable with the woman’s display.

“Is she your girlfriend or are you just fucking?” Nolan’s eyes narrowed, but she wasn’t about to pretend to be anyone other than herself. It didn’t matter that she was sitting in a mansion, on a couch that was probably constructed by hand and cost more than she made in a year.

“That isn’t any of your business, little sister. I haven’t asked about your love life with a member of my security.”

A blush climbed high on her cheeks. She rose from the couch, choosing to drop the subject. “So now what we do?”

“I was hoping you would stay here for awhile. You don’t need to work. If you haven’t noticed, money isn’t a problem for you anymore.”

She found herself standing next to a floor-to-ceiling window and pulled back the lace curtain. The house was isolated, surrounded by thick green forest. She felt an unholy itch to run.

Nolan stood next to her, watching the same scenery. “We own all of it. You can run all day and night if you choose. We have small game in those woods as well to satisfy your hunting needs.”

“I don’t hunt, I don’t run, and I don’t change. I’m sure Adam already reported that back to you. I’m also not going to be moving in here. I have a home and responsibilities to take care of.” She would never fit in here.

“You don’t have to go out every night in search of bad guys and get yourself killed. As your alpha I’m trying to be patient here, but I can refuse to allow you to go.”

*

Nolan realized his mistake the minute it left his mouth. His sister closed herself completely off to him.

Her shoulders stiffened and he could feel the blast of anger rolling off her. “You may be the boss around here but you’re not mine. I didn’t grow up in a *pack*. I’m not like you, any of you. I don’t want my life to change.”

Anger flushed her cheeks and there was a slight tremble in her legs. He forced himself to remain calm. No one ignored him or a direct order, the punishment was severe. He was playing the good host because he truly didn’t want to freak her out. He didn’t know if he’d be able to allow her to go back to hunting down abusive men and fighting them. She wasn’t immortal and if his father were alive there would be no way in hell Arlen would allow her to continue.

“I’m your brother and I only want what’s best for you. Allowing you to troll the

streets at night goes against my nature. You are a female and need protection.” How was he supposed to convince her that he only had her best interests at heart?

She crossed her arms. “That load of shit may work on Barbie, but not on me. I’ve been perfectly capable of running my own life for fifteen years.”

He and stepped forward. “Please Haven, listen to me...”

“I need some air.” She spun on her heel and walked away, throwing open the door and slamming it shut on her way out.

Good going Nolan. Way to try and bully her to get your way. There was a knock on the door. “Not now!” he shouted. He knew it was Claudia; her damn French perfume made his nose itch and he wasn’t in any mood to deal with her.

Chapter Seven

Adam followed her out the back door. She looked over her shoulder. “Back off, Adam.” He didn’t know what Nolan had said to her but she was pissed for sure. There was no way in Hell he was about to let her stalk off and cut herself again.

He never said a word, just followed her as she walked around the house and toward the woods surrounding the estate. Her stiff movements made him want to wrap his arms around her and hold her tight. She wouldn’t relax though, she’d remain rigid and stubborn until he let go.

He hated the fact that her mother had poisoned a young child, made her ashamed of who she was and left her to her own devices when she died. It made him crazy.

It amazed him how well he was getting to know her. The small crease between her brows when she was riled up and the way she set her shoulders when she wasn’t going to argue a point any longer. He was reminded of how a teenage boy acted when around the girl of his dreams. He felt awkward when he was in her presence. Not quite sure what to do and only knowing that he wasn’t about to go anywhere.

Another man might have felt pathetic, stupid or ridiculous. He had no such feelings; he knew what he wanted and he wanted Haven. She kept him on his toes. Life with her would never be boring and the way she looked at him when he was inside her destroyed him. She didn’t realize it, but she’d already staked a claim on him. He just had to wait on her to figure it out.

He remained behind her, allowing her the space to take in her surroundings. She started jogging toward the edge of the woods. He didn’t pick up his pace; he could follow her scent anywhere. He enjoyed the view of her strong legs moving with a fluid grace that made him hard. She was lithe and muscular and drove him to the brink of insanity. All he wanted to do was get her into bed for a month and take her over and over again.

He’d just stepped into the edge of the woods when the smell hit his nose with tremendous force. He growled deep in his chest as his anger rose. *Oh hell no!* He found her sitting on a tree stump, without saying a word he grasped her wrist and tore the knife from her hand. He threw it into the dense brush and turned back to her.

Lowering to his knees, he grabbed her upper arms. “This is going to stop now.” She was shaking badly, her body rigid. A small trickle of blood slid down her forearm. Without thought he bent his head and licked the blood from her wrist slowly up to the crook of her elbow where the cut was already healing.

He rumbled again, the sound echoing throughout the forest as the metallic taste of her hit his tongue. It was sensual, erotic and made him hungry for more, but inside he was still an animal and the smell of blood woke his wolf with a vengeance.

“It’s time for you to stop cutting and change.”

She shook her head violently, and the terror reflected in her eyes made him feel like he’d cut her himself.

“Haven, you’re the bravest woman I have ever known. Your wolf is a part of who you are, it lives within you. You need to embrace her, merge fully with her so you can finally be whole.” His thumbs rubbed the silky skin of her arms, encountering small ridges left by her self-mutilation. She’d sliced her flesh so many times that even the

natural healing ability of a shifter wasn't able to heal the continuous harm she'd caused herself.

"I can't. I don't know how," she whispered, tears clinging to her long lashes. "I'm afraid." Her painful admission was another punch to the gut. He knew how much she hated being vulnerable.

He lifted one hand and cupped her cheek. "You've got to stop this shit. Quit telling yourself you aren't good enough or that you don't deserve to have more in life. This pity party you're having has got to stop."

Her eyes widened and her lips compressed. She needed to hear it because if she stayed caught up in her current frame of mind it would hurt her in the long run. "I'll help you, baby. We'll do this together. I promise it will be all right."

He smiled, holding out his hand. "Take my hand. Trust me." He may have sounded harsh but he needed her to do just that—trust him. She placed a shaky hand in his, took a deep breath and he helped her stand. He unbuttoned his shirt.

"You gotta get naked for me girl."

Her frightened expression morphed into something else as he tabbed open the button on his jeans. The scent of her desire hit his nose as he lowered his zipper. "Come on, get out of those clothes or I'm going to rip them off with my teeth." He wiggled his eyebrows and was rewarded with a half-hearted slap to his chest.

He captured her hand and held it to his chest, kissing the tips of her fingers one by one. "Allow me," he whispered. His hands grasped the bottom of her t-shirt, pushing it straight up and off her. Her bra followed, setting her large breasts free before he bent and swiped his tongue across her nipple.

*

Haven managed to pull her jeans off as Adam suckled her breasts. The adrenaline coursing through her blood continued to increase with each pull his lips made. When he nipped at the hard buds she pushed him away, only to get an eye full of his hard arousal.

He put his hands up. "Okay, okay, later then. Close your eyes and feel what's going on inside of your body."

She followed his directions and closed her eyes; the familiar whine of her wolf was pressing up against her. "I feel her. It feels like she's banging her head against my ribs."

"Good, now don't fight the feeling. Embrace it, imagine yourself and the wolf merging into one. Don't fight her, welcome her. Remember she's a part of your soul, neither of you are complete without the other." His voice was strong as he guided her through her experience.

Colors swirled behind her eyes and the whining within became louder. Sudden painful cramps doubled her over. She screamed as pain ripped along her spine. She'd never known this kind of hurt. Her bones were shrinking, her skin was on fire. Falling to her knees, she looked up at Adam, who was telling her everything was going to be all right.

How the fuck was she going to be all right when she was being shredded, torn in two as her body morphed? She felt his touch on her shoulder and she screamed as she fought the change with everything she had.

This pain was two-fold as she forced her wolf back down inside her. Mentally she shut everything out, including Adam's voice from her.

"It hurts too much. I can't...I can't..."she cried. He pounced on her, forcing her back

onto the ground. His mouth clamped down on hers. Kissing her long and hard, she wrapped her arms around his neck and opened her legs. No words were exchanged and he plunged deeply into her with one thrust. She no longer felt any pain, only the sweetest kind of pleasure. He pounded into her hard, over and over, until her orgasm burst from her and she screamed for more.

*

“Fuck, I want you.” Adam was a wild man as he flipped her onto her stomach and crawled up her back. “Get on your knees now.”

The command sent tremors down her and she rose to her knees. Without preamble he thrust back into her body. Her pussy was slick and ready for him. His big hand pushed her head to the ground which raised her ass higher. He grabbed her hips and moved even harder in and out of her body. “You feel so fucking good Haven. Fuck me.” He cried out as she clenched his cock deep within her. She was the most amazing woman he’d ever met; her body held his like she was molded just for him. Her bold spirit bewitched him.

He gripped her hips harder, his orgasm slammed into him and he threw his head back and howled, the sound echoing around them. He reached under her and rubbed her clit while still pumping into her. She cried out and her body stiffened as her sweet cream surrounded his still-pulsating dick.

She collapsed beneath him, trying to catch her breath as he rolled to his side. A soft rain began to fall, cooling their overheated bodies. She was too fucking afraid to give into her true self. A part of him was pissed at her for giving up, but the other part understood she was dealing with a hell of a lot in a very short amount of time.

He wiped the disappointment he was experiencing from his face. She deserved to take as much time as she needed to reconcile all she’d discovered about herself. He wanted it to be sooner rather than later but he couldn’t be selfish in the matter—not if he was going to stick around. He stood and put his pants back on, then held out his hand. Haven took it and he helped her rise. He bent down to retrieve her clothes. “Come on, let me take you to back to the house.”

* * * *

Haven checked out her old bedroom. She remembered nothing in the pink and white room. She spent hours looking at toys that were unfamiliar, stuffed animals and pretty baby dolls. There was a closet full of frilly dresses with matching hair bows and shoes. *What the hell?* It looked like a shrine and it creeped her out. Why would her family choose to leave the room exactly as it had been when she was taken?

In the corner of the closet she found a worn stuffed pink bunny. *Pinky*. She remembered the animal. She pulled it close to her chest and inhaled. A warm, safe feeling blanketed her and she hugged the animal tighter.

“Dad gave you that when he got back from a business trip.” Haven’s cheeks grew hot as she realized her brother had caught her hugging a stuffed bunny.

The big man sat down at the door of the closet. He reached out and touched the bunny’s ear. “You slept with this damn thing every night. I was grounded for a week once when I tore the ear off.”

“I don’t remember that, but I do remember Pinky.” Her voice trembled. “Tell me the good things.”

For nearly two hours her brother told her stories of her father, of her sisters and of

himself. He avoided the subject of Marion and the demise of the family, for which she was grateful. Instead he made her smile and laugh and he teased her about being a spoiled brat who followed him around and drove him crazy. Haven was jealous of his memories, which were so clear to him and yet she remembered none of them.

He left her alone long enough to retrieve a box. “Before he died Dad asked me to give you this when I found you.” He grabbed her hand and kissed it gently. “I’m happy to have found you, sister. It’s been a long day and you must be tired so I’ll say goodnight and we can talk again tomorrow.”

Haven stroked the small wooden box. “Thank you.”

He didn’t answer; instead he bowed slightly and left her alone.

She laid the unopened box on the dresser—it was too much to deal with at the moment. Instead she peeled off her clothes, turned off the light and crawled under the sheets of her old canopy bed.

She lay completely still, trying to take in all that had happened. Adam’s statement about her having a pity party for herself really sank in. He was right—she was being whiney, not a natural state of being for her.

Trust didn’t come easy for her and now she was being asked to put faith in people she didn’t know. Adam, he was so damn patient with her. His smile filled her mind’s eye, his gentle caresses and his more dominant side surrounded her in a kind of security she’d always dreamed of but never knew.

In their short time together he was teaching her more about who she really was but didn’t allow the world to see. She couldn’t have found a more worthy man, one who believed in her even when she was feeling sorry for herself.

The door opened and Adam’s familiar scent filled the room. She heard him shed his clothes, but he remained silent as he slipped into her bed. He lay on his side and pulled her into his chest. She closed her eyes and basked in his warmth. His hand slid over her ribcage and splayed across the front of her belly.

“You okay, baby?” His quiet question soothed her.

“I don’t know what I’m supposed to do. My life had order before all this. How do I take this all in?” She grabbed onto his hand and held tight.

“One day at a time. You have a lot of anger and pain to deal with.” His warm breath tickled her ear. “Lean on me, you don’t have to go through this alone.”

“Thanks for reminding me of how fucked up I am.” She laughed, taking comfort in his presence.

He chuckled in her ear. “I’m here for you, girl.”

She yawned, her body and her mind were weary. “I can’t imagine why you wanna deal with a crazy woman like me.”

“One day you’ll understand why I like dealing with a crazy woman like you.” He coughed when her elbow connected with his stomach.

Please don’t let me make him run for the hills.

* * * *

Haven woke slowly. She was so damn comfortable underneath the softest comforter she’d ever known and wasn’t in any hurry to move. Adam had snuck out a few hours earlier, whispering in her ear he had some work to do for Nolan.

Adam was the epitome of perfection, at least in her eyes. His hard, honed body, his

beautiful comforting blue eyes. He made her feel safe, he made her feel wanted and he made her feel things she didn't know she was capable of.

She kept most people at arm's length. She'd always thought of herself as an abomination, a pebble in her mother's shoe. She'd told herself her mother loved her, that Marion was messed up because she had been raped so often. To discover her mother hadn't been violated proved to Haven that she wasn't a mistake. Her father had wanted her, had searched for her until his death.

Meeting her brother added to the rollercoaster she was riding. Her brother had been kind so far. He was a bit macho but she guessed in his position that was a prerequisite. She threw back the covers and retrieved her clothes from the floor. After donning them she left the bedroom in search of Adam.

She caught a whiff of coffee and followed the blessed scent to the kitchen. Nolan was seated at the table with a newspaper in his hand. "Good morning. I hope you slept well?" he asked without bothering to put the paper down.

"Yes, thanks," she mumbled and began searching the vast cupboards for a cup.

"Third door on your left." Nolan set the paper down.

She followed his directions and took out a large ceramic mug, filling it with strong black coffee. She took a sip and sighed in relief before joining him at the table.

"Where's Adam?" She missed seeing his face already.

"I needed him to do a few things for me." He offered no further explanation.

"I'm going home today." She put it out there and waited for him to have a fit. She hadn't gotten the impression that would be acceptable when they'd talked yesterday afternoon.

His face tensed. "I don't want you to leave. I've just found you. I want to get to know you again."

She swallowed hard. "I'll be back."

"If you were anyone else I would demand that you stay." His dark eyes became hooded. "There are other ways you can help the females of this world. There is no reason for you to continue your nightly romps."

She wrapped her hands tightly around her coffee cup, determined to remain calm and not lose her temper. "I feel like I have to keep repeating myself to Adam and now to you. It's like a broken record and I am tired of sounding like I'm being unreasonable."

She stood and poured herself another cup of coffee before turning back to her brother. "You've always known about me. You have memories of my life that I don't. I'm still reeling from the fact my mother lied to me about my entire existence."

She sat back down. "I promise I won't stay away. You know where I live and are always welcome, but I have a commitment to Fatima and to myself. I need to do what I'm doing. I can't explain it other than that."

Her brother's face relaxed momentarily, and he reached into his pocket, pulling out a cell phone, a plastic card and a slip of paper. "I'll respect your wishes for now, but there are a few things that I'm going to insist on. These aren't up for debate, sister. I'm going against everything inside me because of the circumstances, but don't make the mistake of thinking that I won't come and get you if I feel you need to be protected."

He laid the phone and the other items in front of her. "That cell has all my numbers as well as the head of my security. Hayden will always know how to find me. The card is for your new bank account. You're a wealthy woman now and I don't want you living in

that rat hole you call home anymore.”

A huge weight lifted from Haven’s shoulders. She didn’t know what she’d expected from Nolan, but she knew letting her leave was difficult for him.

“There’s one more thing.” A toothy smile crossed his face. “Adam will be joining you, permanently.”

“What do you mean permanently? Doesn’t he get a choice in the matter?” She wanted Adam, she wasn’t about to deny that, but she wanted it to be his decision.

Nolan merely shrugged. “Do what you want with him, but he’s now going to be with you in whatever capacity the two of you choose to work out.”

Haven opened her mouth to argue but then his eyes began to glow and his voice deepened. “This isn’t up for debate, little sister. I made a promise to our father to find you and keep you safe and by all that is holy, that’s exactly what I am going to do. Like it or not, you are a shifter and part of *my* pack.”

She wanted to jump up and tell him to go to hell but didn’t. Haven heaved a sigh and relented in the face of her brother’s commanding presence. Something she’d hadn’t even done with Adam.

“Fine.” She said quietly. “But if we kill each other you only have yourself to blame.”

Nolan only laughed, rising from his chair he walked over and placed a kiss against her forehead. “I’m happy we found you. I imagine Adam’s life will be the better for it. I know mine is.” He walked out, leaving her alone to finish her coffee.

She wasn’t alone for long before Claudia’s offensive perfume announced her arrival. The woman made an entrance, her expression thunderous until she caught sight of Haven at the table. The woman’s sudden all-smiles demeanor reminded her of a very fitting saying: *beware of a wolf in sheep’s clothing*. “Good morning, Haven.”

“Good morning to you.” She could be polite and civilized when the situation called for it, though every instinct she had demanded she knock this woman on her ass and throw her out the front door.

“Nolan says you’re leaving us. Too bad, but of course you’re welcome here anytime.” She retrieved a bottle of designer water from the refrigerator. “I also put a call in to the decorator. I think it’s past time to re-do your old room. I never understood Nolan’s need to keep your room as it was, but now that you’re found I imagine you’ll want a more adult-looking room.”

Damn, the woman had a set on her. “Actually, I’d prefer to keep the room as it is until I’ve had a chance to go through my things.”

Claudia waved her hand. “Trust me, I’ve gone through most of the stuff and there is nothing of importance in that room.”

The she-wolf had been through her room. Granted, Haven hadn’t stepped foot in there in over two decades, but the idea of Claudia rummaging through anything belonging to her made her cringe.

“That may be, but I will take care of the room.”

The other’s woman’s blue eyes sparked with anger for a second before turning back to their icy brilliance. “Haven, you seem to me like someone who prefers the truth up front. No dancing politely around when something is up.”

She merely nodded before Claudia grabbed her forearm. “Good, then we’re on the same page. I’ve waited years for Nolan to be free of the past and ready to start a future...with me. Now that you’ve been brought home I only have to get through the

homecoming of the twins and we will finally be able to have a life together. I assume since you have no plans to live here it will stay that way.”

Haven was rarely ever surprised by someone else’s behavior but this woman took the cake. Her wolf was jumping at the chance to tear this woman’s throat out. Instead Haven placed her hand over Claudia’s and removed it from her own arm. The bitch’s long nails scratched her skin and she tightened her hold. “Don’t make the mistake of trying to order me around. I don’t know you and frankly I don’t want to. I don’t care what you do with my brother but if you ever touch me again I’ll rip off all that pretty blonde hair from your head.”

Claudia snapped her teeth at Haven; the woman was pissed. “Careful who you threaten. Nolan’s sister or not, I will see you out of the way by whatever means necessary.”

Haven stood and tossed the rest of her coffee in the sink. She was seething with anger but did her best to control it. *Oh what the hell!*

Turning back around she smiled. “Listen, I don’t give a damn about how long you’ve waited. That’s your problem, not mine. If you ever threaten me again I’ll put you through a wall. You stay out of my way and I’ll stay out of yours.”

She didn’t give Claudia time to respond as she left the kitchen and ran straight into Adam.

“Whoa, hold on there.” He grasped her shoulders. “Where are you going all fired up?”

“Getting away from Nolan’s woman before I manage to piss off my newfound brother.” Haven grabbed Adam’s hand and hauled ass for the front door.

“Oh baby. Trust me, you won’t make him angry.” He squeezed her hand tight and she was instantly more at ease. With Adam near she was able to let go of her anger.

“I want to go home, Adam.” She stopped and released his hand. “Did Nolan tell you that he wants you to go home with me?”

“Yes.”

“You don’t have to if you don’t want to. I…” She was cut off when he wrapped his arms around her and pulled her against his chest.

His strong lips pressed against the column of her neck. “I want to go. Haven, I want to be with you.”

She’d never heard sweeter words in her life. Turning she touched his face. “I’m not sure what I did to deserve a man like you.”

He returned the caress. “You’re everything I want. Besides, I’m a great catch.”

Laughing, she leaned forward until her head touched his chest. He treated her like she was a perfectly normal female. After all the years she thought she was a mistake, a result of violence against her mother, she now knew the truth. She was beginning to see herself differently and Adam was the catalyst—he wanted her just as she was. She didn’t have to pretend with him, she didn’t have to be tough, or unfeeling. She didn’t have to be alone.

Chapter Eight

Haven was quiet on the way home. Home. Adam liked the sound of it. Of course Nolan had insisted they had to find a place in a better neighborhood. Adam didn't bother mentioning that Nolan told him he would have Adam's head on a pike if anything happened to her.

He'd never lived with a woman before. Hell, he'd never wanted to. Life with her would never be dull. Adam wasn't a fool, though, and knew he had to tread carefully. She'd been alone for so long that he wasn't sure she even knew how to share her life. Not to mention her refusal to shift. He couldn't explain to her why she needed to do it, she'd managed all her life not to give in to her natural urges. He was sure her body wouldn't be able to keep up the punishing pace of hunting offenders for much longer, not without letting her wolf take over.

They arrived at her apartment, so Adam took out two duffle bags and followed her in. As soon as the door shut she jumped into his arms and almost laid him flat with a blistering kiss. He returned the kiss with as much passion as she gave. Her mouth opened and they became more desperate.

He broke the embrace. "We go slow this time. I want to make love with you, *slowly*." She nodded and he led them into the room and to the bed. He bent and kissed her softly, no demands, just a small taste of her perfect lips. He could spend days, weeks just finding ways to make her scream his name.

His lips moved to her cheeks and along her jaw, finally catching her sensitive lobe and drawing a moan. His hands skimmed up her hips, her ribs, tracing swirling patterns up her arms. He moved back down, grabbed the hem of her shirt and pulled it off. Her bra followed.

He dropped to his knees, pressing his mouth against her tummy and rubbing his cheek along her satiny skin. He teathed the snap of her jeans, then ripped it off.

Her long fingers twined in his hair. "I don't think I can deal with going slow." She whispered as he drew down the zipper with his teeth.

"Tough. This time we're going slow, baby. I'm going to learn how you taste everywhere." His tongue traced the exposed flesh that had been covered by her button and zipper. "I need to taste you."

He pushed her jeans to the floor, stopping when they reached her boots. He took the time to unlace the damn things and flung them in the corner when she stepped out of them. She stepped out of her pants and stood before him gloriously naked, his warrior woman.

He traced her hips with his tongue, then slid across the inside of her quivering thighs. "Sit down and spread your legs wide." His voice had grown rough with his desire to taste her. She must have sensed it because she did exactly as he commanded.

He gazed at her intently, then moved between her smooth thighs and flicked his tongue along her outer lips. Christ, but she tasted like ambrosia. He opened her puffy pink lips and nibbled and licked her swollen clit.

His middle finger rimmed her entrance before plunging into her depths. Pulling out his soaked finger, he sucked it into his mouth until he'd swallowed every drop that clung

to the digit.

He thrust back into her pussy and sucked her clit at a steady pace. Again her fingers speared through his hair and she pulled him closer as her hips rose to grind against his eager mouth. He could come in his pants just by her reaction alone. He increased the speed of his fingers as his tongue moved over and around her clit, trying to taste every inch of flesh between her thighs.

“Adam, dear God I’m coming.” She cried out his name and it shot straight to his heart. Her fingers and legs tightened as she cried out, riding her orgasm. When her shaking stopped he removed his fingers and again licked them clean. She’d fallen back on the bed, a glazed look in her eyes.

Adam shed his shirt and undid his jeans, getting them halfway down before she grabbed his legs. “Not so fast, pal. My turn.”

*

Haven experienced the greatest orgasm she’d ever known and was damn sure she was going to make him feel as out of control as she’d been only moments before. She thrust her hand in his boxer briefs and pulled out his cock, then rubbed the tips of her fingers along the length. She learned every ridge and bump, determining what touch would draw out a groan of pleasure.

Her other hand cupped his balls, gently at first. Her mouth watered as she led him between her lips. His hands were on either side of her head, just holding himself still while she sucked, licked and tasted him. She loved how he filled her mouth and when she chanced a look at him her heart wanted to burst from the perfect smile he gave her.

She played a little harder with his sac, adding a little more pressure, which caused him to move slightly in and out of her mouth. She’d never felt pleasure going down on a man before, but with Adam it was different. He’d managed to push through her hardened soul and opened her up to all the possibilities that life and love had to offer. He’d showed her how to laugh and how it was okay if things weren’t perfect. She could suck him for hours if only to see the look in his steel-blue eyes, and the deep moans he gave her. This moment with him made her feel more powerful than any fight she’d been in. He was truly beautiful.

“Enough, Haven,” he whispered, tugging her up by her arms. He placed one hand behind her neck and gently lowered her to the mattress. “Open up for me, baby.”

He moved between her thighs and guided his hard cock to her entrance. Grabbing her hips he moved forward slowly and they both cried out as he seated himself within her tight sheath.

He lowered himself, propping up on his elbows. “You feel so damn good. Hold onto me.” She wrapped her arms around his back, her short nails digging into hard muscle. He lay fully on her, his arms looping beneath hers and grasping her shoulders. She locked her legs at the small of his back, raising her hips to meet the ever-increasing speed of his thrusts. No words were spoken, only cries and sighs of pleasure.

He kissed her lips, opening her mouth with the tip of his tongue; she returned the kiss with as much hunger as he had. They were locked together at the hip and mouth while he drove deeply in and out of her. She moved faster beneath him as their kisses intensified until the tide of their lovemaking set her body on fire, filling her up with nothing but pure bliss.

It started deep in her belly and exploded along every nerve she possessed. Her pussy

contracted and gripped his cock so hard his eyes rolled back and he pounded hard into her once, twice and then he let out a long howl as came deep within her.

He rolled off of her and wrapped her up in his arms. Nothing was said as they both tried to suck in big gulps of air. Haven's body quivered and to her dismay she felt tears on her lashes.

The floodgates opened and for the first time since her mother's death Haven cried. Soulful sobs for all she'd missed out on, for all the bitterness she'd carried around with her. For all the women she'd discovered, beaten, bruised or sexually abused. She let it out in the arms of the man she trusted, the man she cared so deeply for.

Adam never said a word. He stroked her hair and kissed her temples and let her cry without offering commentary. He was a truly exceptional man and she knew she was falling in love with him.

Chapter Nine

Adam and Haven had been patrolling almost every night for two weeks. In the past she'd always fought alone, thinking she preferred it that way. But hunting down trolls was a lot more fun with Adam in tow. Besides going out at night, he was teaching her about her heritage, her brother and her father.

She would have loved to have met her father as an adult; he sounded like a good and decent man. She was slowly reconciling the fact that what her mother told her so long ago was a lie. She wanted to hate Marion, but the only emotion she connected with was pity. The woman had been so self-absorbed that she'd given away two of her children and ignored Haven.

Adam heard a noise from behind a building at the same time her cell rang. She nodded him on ahead and answered, "Tima?"

"Oh God, Haven. We're being attacked," her friend whispered.

"Where are you?" Panic settled deep in Haven's stomach. Fatima was the bravest woman she knew, but there was terror in her voice.

"I've locked us in one of the safe rooms, but they know about it and are trying to batter their way through."

"Those are double steel re-enforced doors. How the hell are they able to get close to you?" Haven asked, walking quickly to catch up with Adam.

"They aren't human. I don't know what they are and Donovan is out of town." Tima screamed and the phone went dead.

"Adam." Haven yelled as she took off at a run. She heard his footsteps fall in behind her. "The shelter is under attack and Fatima said they aren't human."

Adam grabbed her arm stopping her. "Take this." He pulled a nine millimeter from his waist. "I've got an extra one. Until we know what the hell we're dealing with, keep the safety off and pointed straight out in front of you."

She nodded and ran toward the shelter. Thank God they were only a few blocks away. She heard Adam on the phone with Nolan, yelling out the situation and asking if they had anyone else in the city. He rattled off the exact location of the building.

They reached the darkened front of the shop. Haven retrieved the key to the store from her pocket. "Shhh..." She whispered as she placed the key into the lock and turned it carefully.

Gun drawn, she headed in, thankful Adam hadn't insisted on entering. She knew the layout and Fatima's exact location. They silently walked through the store and into the back room. She slid a tower of boxes aside to reveal a door that led to the underground shelter. A door that was bent in the middle and whose lock looked like it had been ripped out.

Using two fingers she opened the mangled steel, thrusting her gun inside before following it with her head. It was dead quiet and she sure as hell didn't like it.

She stepped slowly down the darkened stairs, ready to put a bullet right between the eyes of these animals if Fatima was harmed in anyway. She didn't like this. It was too quiet, and as soon as her foot reached the last step a light was turned on. The single bulb burned sickly yellow as it swung from the ceiling.

A muffled cry drew her attention to the corner of the room. Fatima was tied to a chair, her mouth gagged. Haven ran over to her and pulled down the gag.

“It’s a trap Haven, get out of here.” No sooner had the words left her friend’s mouth than a fist punched her in the side of the head, stunning her. Her gun was knocked loose and skittered across the concrete floor. She fell, landing on her side. She tried to stand but the person who’d hit her lifted her up by the back of her jacket.

“Stupid human, how could you ever think you possess the strength to best me in any way?” His breath tickled her ear as he whispered to her alone. “Such a pity you have to die. You must be a wildcat in bed. I could spend hours taming you.”

He slammed her down into a chair and quickly tied her wrists behind her before binding her feet together.

“Haven,” Adam shouted and she looked up to see him being attacked by three men. One had him in a chokehold while the other two were beating him to a pulp. He tried to shake them off but was unable to defend the onslaught of punches and kicks. She didn’t know what they were dealing with but she knew they were in some serious trouble.

Tall, dark, handsome and scary crouched down in front of her. His short black hair framed an exquisite face, as smooth as marble and perfectly bronzed. Golden eyes reflected the pale light in such a way it hurt to look at them. His lips were to die for, perfectly formed, promising an evening of untold pleasure. He had power, true power, old power that radiated off him in waves. Haven was positive he could squash her like a bug if he so chose. “Well, well little hunter. I’ve heard stories of the vigilante running around the streets beating up the bad guys.” His snarl transformed the beauty of his face into something hideous. “You don’t appear so fearsome.”

“Who are you?” she asked, trying to stem the fear running through every fiber in her body.

“Who I am is not important. What is important is your time on this earth is over. You’ve made someone very angry and we’ve been brought in to deal with you.” Next to her ‘Tima was holding back tears in her big brown eyes.

“I’m so sorry,” she cried.

Haven tried to comfort her with a shrug of her shoulders before she looked at the giant of a man in front of her. “Well, since this is my last day on earth, do ya mind telling me who wants me dead so badly they would resort to a hired gun?”

“That would be me.” French perfume wafted into the room. She closed her eyes as Claudia’s voice raked down her spine.

“Jesus, what is your problem?” she spat. Another chair was pushed next to her and Adam was smashed down hard in it. Two men still held him as a third tied his wrists and ankles. He was bleeding from his nose and his lips. Both eyes were blackened, and a nasty purple bruise was forming high on his cheek. He was wheezing and she bet he had some broken ribs to go along with his other injuries. She couldn’t stand the sight of him beaten so badly. She was going to kill them all when she got the chance.

Claudia sauntered over to the leader of the men and wrapped her arm around his waist. “I’ve waited for years. Nolan was going to marry me and I would become more wealthy than even you can imagine.” The man bent low to plant a kiss on Claudia’s red lips. “Merrin doesn’t mind if I get married, life would be perfect. But you had to show up and take Nolan’s attention away from our relationship. I’m going to enjoy killing you myself, but before I do that you’re going to watch your best friend and your lover being

torn into pieces.”

Haven swallowed her fear. “Nolan will never marry you. He has better judgment than to take you on.”

Claudia sauntered across the room, her heels clicking loudly on the floor. She reached over to pat Adam’s hair. “This plan has been in motion since the day my father convinced your mother to leave.”

Haven felt the familiar growl she usually held back rumbling in the back of her throat. This time she let it out, low and menacing.

“That’s right, you don’t know. Daddy knew Nolan would have to share his wealth with you and your sisters. We could all see how shallow Marion was. So Daddy planted a little seed, telling her Arlen would eventually kill her.” She paused to push her hair back. “She was easily duped, so we helped her get out and arranged for the two youngest to be adopted. Why she insisted on keeping you remains a mystery. My father kept Arlen chasing phantom leads until your mother died.”

Claudia’s eyes widened for a brief moment before she laughed and sat down on Adam’s lap. He turned his face away from the she-devil and straight at Haven. “What do you think, Adam? Should I be afraid of her little noises? I know she hasn’t shifted.”

Leaning over she licked Adam’s jaw. “My father was the rightful Alpha of the pack until Arlen challenged him. Daddy lost the challenge due to a previous injury. On that day he vowed to become Alpha once again.”

“Nolan will shred you for this.” Adam’s jaw was clenched.

She only smiled and bit his shoulder. Haven screamed as the other woman bit through his clothes and deep into his flesh; she could do nothing as the blood ran down his chest. Adam gritted his teeth but never cried aloud.

“You’ll wish Nolan was taking care of you. He’d show you mercy I won’t.” Haven meant every word. While Claudia was basking in her own greatness, she’d managed to retrieve her knife from her back pocket and was slowly cutting through her bonds. It was difficult not drawing the notice of the men in the room, so she was careful to cut slow and shallow.

“I daresay you won’t survive this night. Do you honestly think you’re actually going to walk out of here in one piece?” Claudia pressed her lips against Adam’s bloody ones before pulling back and licking them. “Hmm. Maybe I should keep him around to play with for awhile. Tell me Haven, is he as good in bed as I’ve imagined him to be?” Merrin and his men laughed, taking pleasure in Claudia’s twisted game.

The ropes at her wrists loosened. “How about we make it just between us? You let Adam and Fatima go, send your little fighters away and we take care of this problem like two wolves would.”

The blonde stood, taking her time as she squeezed Adam’s shoulder. This time he hissed in pain.

“You want to fight like wolves? You’ve never even shifted. It’s more merciful if I let my friends make your death quick. Watching Merrin tear apart your lover and friend,” she waved a hand at Fatima, “is all I require as payment for fucking up my plans with your brother.”

The truth hit Haven just as the rope holding her wrists together severed. She grabbed the frayed ends before they fell to the floor. “Oh my God. He dumped you, didn’t he? That’s why you doing this. He saw right through you and kicked your skinny blonde ass

to the curb.”

Claudia’s grin disappeared. “Don’t you worry yourself about that. As soon as you’re dead I’ll be there to comfort him. Enough of this, Merrin. Cut her best buddy’s head off.”

Haven wasn’t sure what Merrin was, but he sure as hell wasn’t human. His eyes threw off a red flame in the middle as he pulled out a machete.

She reacted without thinking as soon as Merrin walked toward Fatima, throwing her knife with deadly accuracy. The force of the throw imbedded the knife to the hilt and he fell back on the ground. He was screaming in a language she’d never heard before while his large hands fumbled trying to get the small blade out. Claudia ran to him and removed the blade. “Stupid girl. You can’t kill a Dark Fey with your tiny weapon.”

“What the hell are you talking about?” If her knife hadn’t hurt him, then what the hell would?

“No, a bit of steel won’t kill him, but I have something that will.” Both women turned to the stairs. A man dressed in a long black duster stood in the doorway. He was equal in build to Merrin, but where Claudia’s man was dark, this man was light, his hair a brilliant white with hints of silver running through it. His eyes were the lightest of blue, bordering on incandescent, reminding Haven of a cloudless summer sky. He said no more, simply raised his arm, revealing a small crossbow, his finger on the trigger.

He fired the weapon and an arrow shot out and into the exact place Claudia had pulled the knife from. The dark fey dropped to the floor and screeched. “Run! He has fucking iron.”

The white-haired man continued to fire, taking out the male nearest Fatima. As the arrow hit its mark the fey fell to the concrete screaming.

Haven untied Adam’s hands. “I’m getting Fatima out of here while the others are distracted.” He merely nodded his head.

She quickly moved to Fatima, released her from her bonds and pulled her from the chair. She dragged her across the concrete floor until they reached the steps. “Go, go. Run ‘Tima, run.”

‘Tima passed the beautiful white-haired man on the stairs. He stopped her momentarily and caressed her face.

“Donovan.” she whispered.

His smile was almost blinding. “Go, Fatima.”

Haven turned back to finish untying Adam and saw Claudia in wolf form jumping on her lover, hitting him square in the chest. His chair fell back, the wolf following him down. Claudia raised her head and howled before she opened her mouth to bite at Adam. Suddenly Haven’s vision blurred. Her body burned and she knew what was happening. Seeing *that* woman attacking her man called her wolf to the door, demanding freedom to save her mate.

She was so used to fighting the beast and she was fighting her yet again, even in the face of Adam being mauled. Donovan grabbed her arm. “You must change to save his life.” He released her and ran at the other men, raising his crossbow as he went.

She heard the swoosh of arrows flying, the clash of steel, and screaming in a language she’d didn’t understand. She stood frozen until Claudia turned her head and Haven saw all the blood on her muzzle—Adam’s blood. In that instant she reached deep down inside of her, calling to the one thing she knew would help save Adam.

Pain ripped through her shoulder blades and down her spine. She fell to her knees

and slapped her hands on the floor. In her mind she saw her wolf; she was a deep chestnut brown and was chomping to get a bite of Claudia.

Her heart rate increased and she was afraid it would burst at any moment. Then it was over. In a matter of seconds the pain ceased and she was no longer human. Allowing the wolf's instinct to take over, she ran and leapt onto Claudia's back. Her mouth latched onto the back of Claudia's neck and she sank her teeth in.

The bitch's blood filled her mouth, and the scent and taste sent her into a frenzy. It was like being trapped inside her own body, while seeing things through the wolf's eyes.

She wasn't in control as she tore at Claudia; they rolled onto the floor, biting and vying for control. The blonde wolf managed to sink her teeth into Haven's side. Haven yelped before slamming her heavy weight into Claudia. It was good to have a little heft, as she clearly outweighed the blonde. Haven's jaw closed on the other wolf's hind leg and it snapped. When she pushed the wolf rolled over and tried to stand before falling to the floor. Haven took advantage and ripped into her exposed belly. Haven didn't stop her rage-filled attack until Claudia stopped fighting back. Her death was painful, her howls and cries bounced off every wall, echoing loudly in the room.

Haven left the body and approached Adam. She wailed, looking at his prone form lying in a pool of blood with his ankles still tied. She moved him with her nose, whining.

He opened his eyes. "You did it, Haven. You're whole now." His eyes fluttered before closing. She tried to cry but it only came out as a desperate keening sound.

A hand touched the fur on her back, she turned and growled but stopped when she recognized Donovan. Behind him were the six bodies of the Dark Fey, all dead. "We must get him out of here. He needs to be forced into the change. It's the only way he has a chance to survive."

He reached down and removed the ropes, then picked Adam up as though he weighed nothing and carried him up the stairs. She followed, still in wolf form because she had no fucking clue how to turn back.

She jogged behind them to a limousine, and after Donovan laid him in the back seat she hopped in and curled up next to Adam.

Donovan was embracing a shocked Fatima, talking to her in that strange language she'd heard him use earlier. He kissed her on the forehead and then pulled out his cell.

Her attention was drawn back to Adam. His breathing was shallow, his neck ripped in a way no one should be able to survive. He was bleeding from several bites up and down his chest and legs. Between the mauling and his earlier beating she was terrified he wouldn't make it. If he died he would take her heart with him.

She'd never felt so fucking helpless in her life. The one man in the world who meant everything to her may die *because* of her. Because of Claudia's deceit and the woman's despicable father. For what, for power, for the right to be the boss. She'd never understand it. The only thing she knew for sure was that she didn't know if she'd be able to live if Adam died. She lifted her nose and touched his hand. In her state it was all the comfort she could give.

Chapter Ten

Adam opened his eyes. His body ached from head to toe but he was alive. He hadn't expected to survive Claudia's attack. He could still remember her teeth ripping into the tender flesh, lying in his own blood. How they'd managed to get the hell out of Fatima's underground shelter was nothing short of a miracle.

His right side was blanketed in warmth. He grinned as Haven's familiar scent tickled his nose. Turning his head, he watched her deep in sleep, cuddled as close to him as their bodies allowed. Her skin looked pale though, and there were dark circles under her eyes.

He gently ran his finger along her cheek. She immediately raised her head, panic written all over her. She breathed a sigh when she knew it was him. "You're awake."

He nodded, then frowned as he studied her face. It was tight with worry and she looked as if she hadn't slept in a long time.

She sat up. "I'll tell Nolan you're awake."

He wasn't about to let her leave him just yet. "Nolan can wait. I need to know how the hell we got out of there alive."

"Donovan came in the nick of time to kill the Dark Fey that Claudia was in league with." She rubbed her hands up and down his forearm. "While I was getting Tima to safety Claudia went after you. I lost my mind when I saw your blood on her muzzle...so I killed her." The last of the sentence left her mouth on a whisper.

Adam's stomach knotted. "You shifted, didn't you?"

She nodded, and tears started to fall from the corner of her eyes. "I couldn't let her kill you. My fear about shifting was nothing compared to the thought of living without you."

His stopped her from rubbing his arm and instead laced his fingers with hers. "You saved my life. I'd be dead if you hadn't shifted. Thank you."

Haven laughed. "No, thank you. You saved *my* life. Saved me from the hatred that was eating me up inside. You've shown me what it means to love and care for another person more than myself."

Watching her confess her feelings, his own eyes threatened to tear up, but in his usual smart-ass way he laughed. "I knew you loved me."

"I won't slap you since you're still recovering, but when you're all better I'm going to get you back." She leaned forward and kissed him lightly on the tip of his nose. She pulled back enough to look him in the eyes. "I love you, Adam."

He raised his head and kissed her soft lips. He hadn't known how badly he wanted to hear those very words from this woman until she'd spoken. "I've loved you from the moment I first shared that drink with you and I love you even more today."

"You just have to one up me, don't you?" She smiled, her face relaxed, the harsh lines of worry now erased from her face.

"No, but it's fun teasing the hell out of you." He quipped, then pulled her into his arms and kissed her. It was their first kiss in their new life together as a couple admitting their love. He owed Nolan a fine, aged bottle of scotch.

The End

About the Author:

Sierra Summers is one half of the writing team Violet Summers. She lives in Michigan with her husband, three children and two dogs. She is grateful that she has the opportunity to fulfill her dream of writing.

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